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#114/203 JULY 2006



REVIEWS



(or not)

DAVE ALVIN

RUSSELL BARTLETT

JOHNNY CASH

SLAID CLEAVES

THE COMING GRASS

RUBY DEE

& THE SNAKEHANDLERS

RICHARD DOBSON

FRED J EAGLESMITH

JOHNNY EDSON

MISS LAUREN MARIE

MICHAEL ONEILL

AMILIA K SPICER

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CHARLES EARLE'S B-Sides

FREEFORM AMERICAN ROOTS #83

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FREEFORM AMERICAN ROOTS #83

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DURING JUNE 2006

#1 DAVE ALVIN: WEST OF THE WEST

(Yep Roc) *CP/*CS/*GC/*JM/*MB/*RV/*TW

- 2 Fred J Eaglesmith: *Milly's Cafe*
(A Major Label) *AB/*AN/*BR/*RS/*TF/*TR/*WR
- 3 The Ginn Sisters: *Blood Oranges*
(Sweetbird) *AA/*DA/*FS/*GS/*HP/*ND
- 4 Johnny Cash: *Personal File*
(Legacy) *B&C/*BL/*DJ/*GM/*NA/*RH/*TA
- 5 Hacienda Brothers: *What's Wrong With Right?*
(Proper American) *BF/*DF/*KC/*KF
- 6 Slaid Cleaves: *Unsung* (Rounder) *BW/*CF
- 7 Darrell Scott: *The Invisible Man* (Full Light) *CD/*DY/*RJ
- 8 Bruce Springsteen: *We Shall Overcome; The Seeger Sessions*
(Sony/Columbia) *MP/*MR/*SR
- 9= Bottle Rockets: *Zoysia* (Bloodshot) *BB/*JF
The Derailers: *Soldiers Of Love* (Palo Duro) *HT/*MF
- 10= Ray Wylie Hubbard: *Snake Farm* (Sustain) *DT/*KB/*TG
The Wailin' Jennys: *Firecracker* (Red House) *ES/*JR
- 11= Cornell Hurd Band: *Texas By Night* (Behemoth) *MM
Introducing Miss Lauren Marie (Texas Jamboree) *DC/*JD/*FY
- 12 Audrey Auld Mezera & Nina Gerber: *In The House* (Reckless) *KD
- 13 James Hand: *The Truth Will Set You Free* (Rounder) *BP
- 14 Kieran Kane, Kevin Welch & Fats Kaplin: *Lost John Dean*
(Compass) *JP
- 15 Cari Lee & The Saddle-ites: *Brought To You Via Saddle-ite*
(Startone) *JZ
- 16= T-Bone Burnett: *The True False Identity* (DMZ) *BK/*SC
Elvis Costello & Allen Toussaint: *River In Reverse*
(Verve Forecast) *RC/*TJ
- 17 VA: *The Pilgrim: A Celebration Of Kris Kristofferson*
(New West) *KM/*SF
- 18 Ralph Stanley: *A Distant Land To Roam* (Sony) *CL/*MDT
- 19= Chatham County Line: *Speed Of The Whippoorwill*
(Yep Roc) *DWT
Tim Hus: *Huskies & Husqvarnas* (self) *BS/*RA
- 20= Deadstring Brothers: *Starving Winter Report* (Bloodshot) *DN
Drag The River: *It's Crazy* (Suburban Home) *GV/*TM
- 21 The Stumbleweeds: *Evil On Your Mind* (Spinout)
- 22 Dixie Chicks: *Taking The Long Way* (Sony/BMG) *N&T
- 23= Kris Delmhorst: *Strange Conversation* (Signature Sounds) *JB
I See Hawks In LA: *California Country* (Western Seed) *DG
Irma Thomas: *After The Rain* (Rounder) *DO
- 24 Hunger Mountain Boys: *Three* (Old-Fi) *FW
- 25= The Blind Robins: *Panorama Valley* (Rolling Blackout) *T&J
Digney Fignus: *Trouble On The Levee* (self) *OO
Jon Dee Graham: *Full* (Freedom)
The Handsome Family: *Last Days Of Wonder* (Carrot Top) *ST
Rhonda Vincent: *All American Bluegrass Girl* (Rounder) *MA
- 26 Alejandro Escovedo: *The Boxing Mirror* (Back Porch)
- 27= The Bittersweets: *The Life You Always Wanted* (Virt) *DS
Sam Bush: *Laps In Seven* (Sugar Hill)
Jackie Greene: *American Myth* (Verve Forecast/VMG) *SB
Hundred Year Flood: *Blue Angel* (Frogville) *AOK
The Little Willies (Milking Bull) *XE
Southpaw: *Buffalo Mansions* (Gold Rush) *RE
Amy Speace: *Songs For Bright Street* (Wildflower)
Eric Taylor: *The Great Divide* (Blue Ruby) *LW
VA: *Harlan County USA* (Rounder) *JT



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*XX = DJ'S ALBUM OF THE MONTH

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LOOSE DIAMONDS: A DJ'S PRIVATE STASH # 25

JENNY 'HOSS' HAUBENREISER

As I anticipate making some form of written contact with my fellow FARsters, I realize the difficulty of putting into any concise form my inner feelings and experiences related to music and radio. I come to this with a niggling sense of inadequacy: unlike many of my radio colleagues, certainly those I've come to admire via cryptic initials on the FAR list, I do not possess any long and honorable musical or radio pedigree. Oh, like many, some of my most salient life memories are linked to the radio—I recall only too well those years of early adolescent angst both facilitated and ameliorated by my beloved transistor radio. Back then, the good stations hosted everything from Frank Sinatra and Bob Dylan to Bobby Goldsboro, Herb Alpert and Glen Campbell. During that fog of youth I thought the best songs in the world were Mason Williams' *Classical Gas*, Dylan's *Like a Rolling Stone*, The Ventures' *Hawaii Five-O* and, of course, Brewer & Shipley's *One Toke Over The Line*.

Jumping ahead to a few years past the point I had landed in Bozeman, Montana, (smack in the midst of my mid-life angst), and having thoroughly given up on commercial radio and most certainly commercial country music (with a few exceptions), I found the local public radio station. KGLT. That was nearly six years ago, and I can say from the heart that my connection to independent radio (fritzy boards, duct tape and all), and discovering the beauty of truly independent and real country music has yielded a world of joy and meaning. Discovering FAR can only be described as icing on the cake (not to mention the crème filling and the cherry on top). The monthly FAR report has served as a sort of beacon and monthly guide for me—helping negotiate the stacks of hot and not-so-hot offerings that pass through our hands.

These are the records I would want in the pantry should I be snowbound in Montana for a year, which could happen, tho it's funny to be talking about this when it's hotter than blazes outside. They do not necessarily represent all my favorites, nor am I taking into account what would be included in the realm of high critical acclaim, I mean, whatever turns our crank, right? These albums include songs that have that ineffable quality needed to get me through cold dark nights. This is the music that makes me happy, no matter the weather. **Dwight Yoakam: Reprise, Please Baby: The Warner Bros Years** (Rhino 2002). Okay, I'll confess... this is at the top of the list partially due to the pictures, what can I say about the blue jeans, not to mention the fabulous retro shots of Dwight sporting wide-leg bell-bottoms and a quasi-mullet. Dwight Yoakam (or Dwighty-O as I call him) always gets me going... Nuff said.

Calexico: The Black Light (Quarterstick, 1998) This one is one of my favorites. These guys are just so hip—meaning even the act of playing their music makes me feel way more cool than I am.

The Mavericks: The Definitive Collection (MCA, 2004) The Mavs also never fail to make me happy (they seem to make my listeners happy too based on the calls I get). And Malo's retro crooner songs just melt me—just the ticket for a cold winter night.

Robert Earl Keen: No Kinda Dancer (Sugar Hill 1984); **Walking Distance** (Arista 1998) Robert Earl is one of my favorite songwriters so I would need a double shot (along with some of the others who follow below). I could listen to his stories every day—they literally paint pictures in my mind.

The Very Best Of Buck Owens Vol 2 (Rhino 1994) Need to remember my roots.

Gram Parsons: GP/Grievous Angel (Reprise 1990) Short on life but long on influence. Takes me back to a good place in my mind.

James McMurtry: Live in Aught-Three (Compadre 2004) Dang near anything out of this guy's mouth just sends me. His rhythm, lyrics, mood of his songs define 'cool' in my book.

Steve Earle: Transcendental Blues (Artemis 2000); **Just An American Boy** (Artemis 2004) Same goes for Steve E. And I so admire his politics and courage to be honest about what what's going on in this weird world of ours.

Junior Brown: Guit With It (Curb 1993); **Semi-Crazy** (Curb 1996) The Guit-steel blues will fix about any emotional pickle, and that sweet surf medley on **Semi-Crazy** will warm even the coldest day.

Finally, I would want to throw in a couple of music DVDs: **Heartworn Highways** (Catfish, 2003) and **The Mavericks, Live in Austin TX** (Sanctuary, 2004), hooo-wee, just makes ya wanna dance. After all, DJs cannot live by songs alone.

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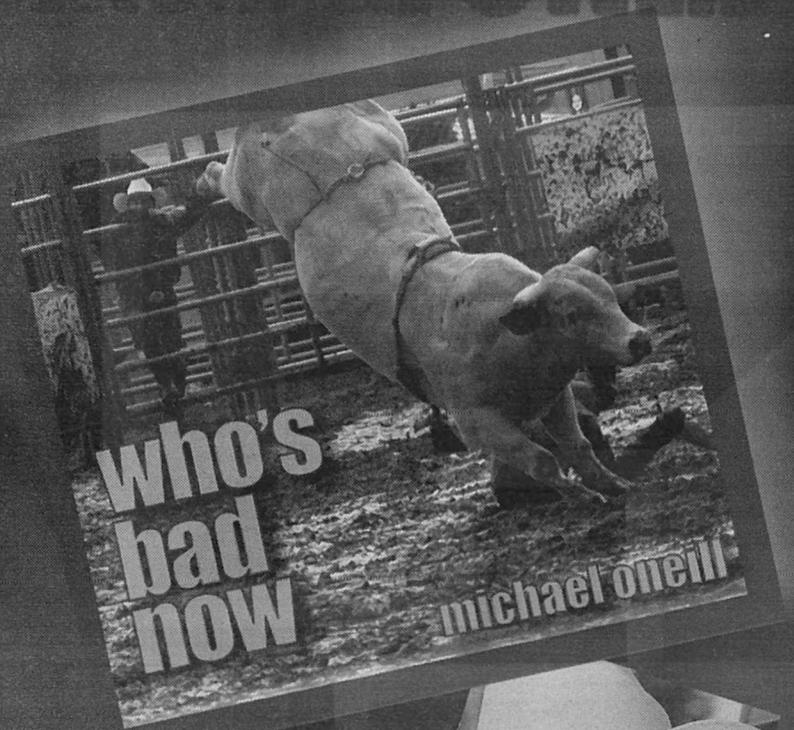
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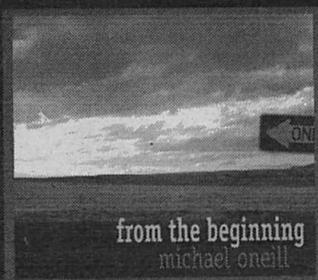


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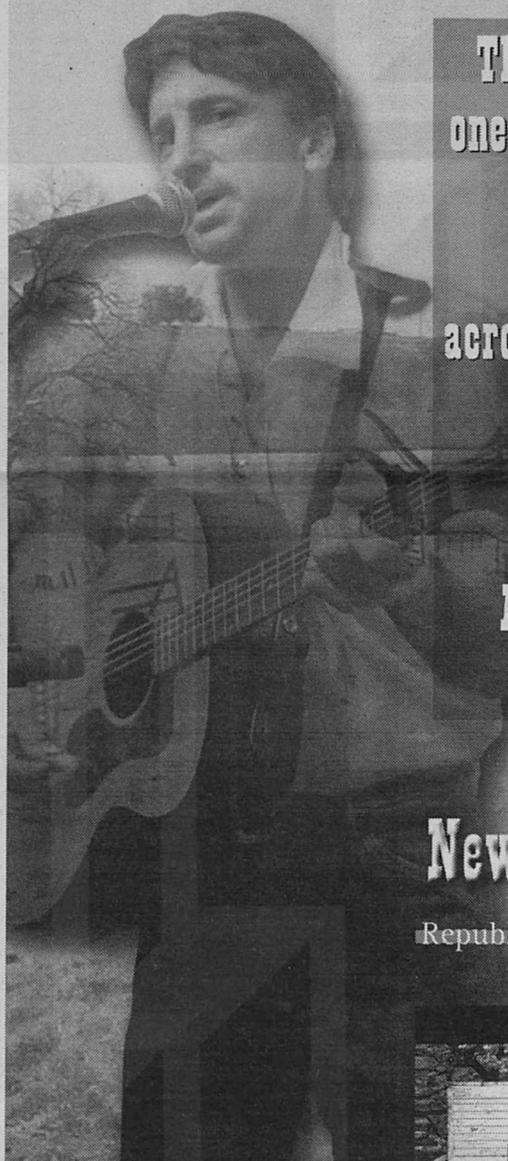


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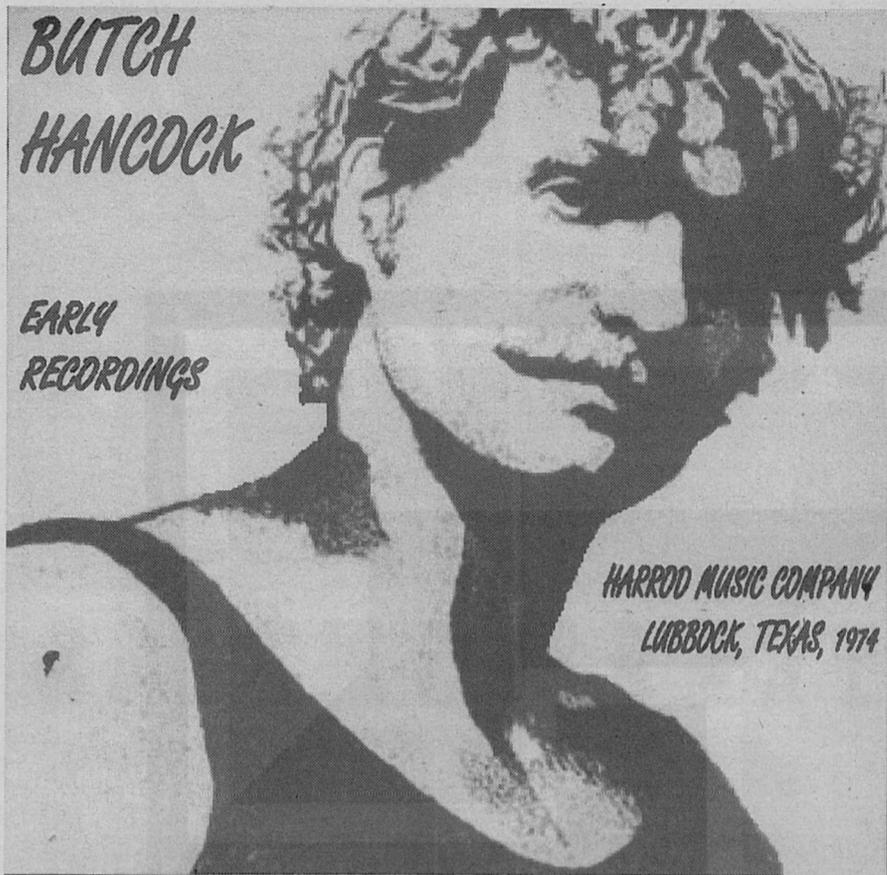


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BUTCH HANCOCK

EARLY
RECORDINGS



BURNING SPACE

Up to the last minute, I thought this was going to be a 12 page issue, but wound up with eight pages of ads, which required eight pages of copy, and I was one short. I figured if Ray Wylie Hubbard's **Snake Ranch** showed up before deadline, a very, very intense listening and writing session would take care of some of it, but what about the rest? So, time to get creative. Going widdershins:

HAPPY BIRTHDAY, BUTCH

To celebrate **Butch Hancock's** 61st birthday, July 12th, here's the cover of the 'album' mentioned in *John The Revelator*, recorded when he was 19.

GHOST WRITER IN WEST VIRGINA

Last September, 3CM/FAR favorite **John Lilly** entered *Blue Highway* in the annual Ghost Writers In The Sky contest for songs written in the style of Hank Williams and won this customized Washburn F-25 Dreadnought acoustic guitar.

MAKING BIG HAIR LOOK GOOD

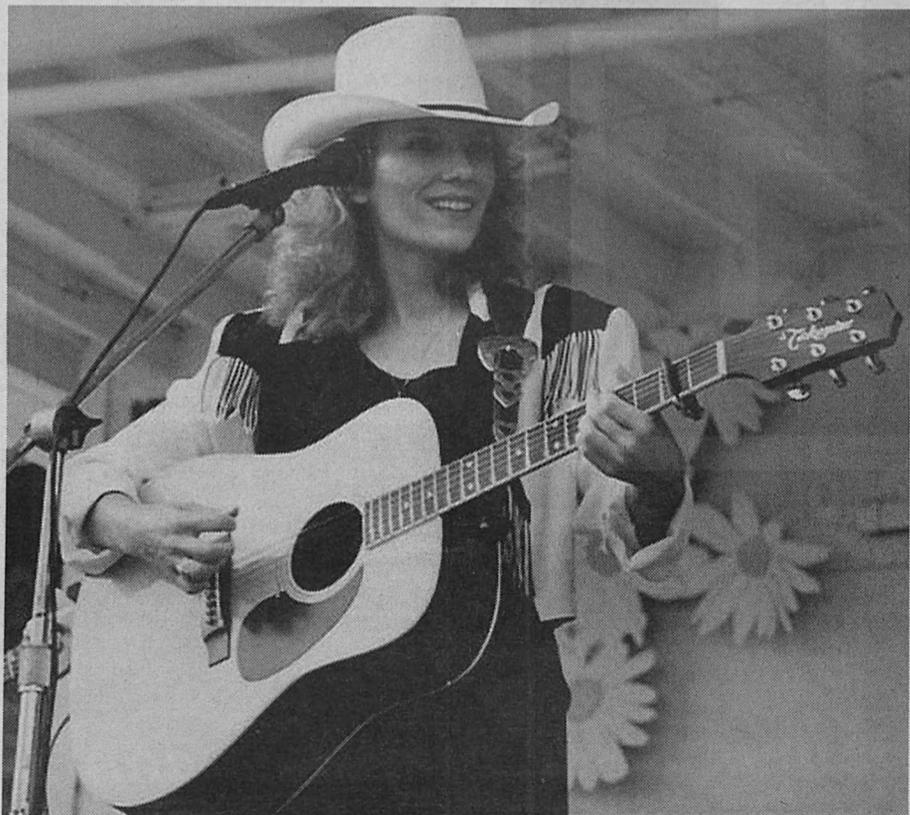
After I reviewed **The Versatile Porter Wagoner** last month, Lilly asked if there were any duets featuring his old friend **Pam Gadd**, Wagoner's current 'girl singer.' There were three which I didn't mention as I'd never heard of Gadd or **Wild Rose**, the all-girl big hair band she fronted in the late 80s, of which John says, "They were a bluegrass/newgrass/country group that in some ways foreshadowed the Dixie Chicks. Truth be told, Wild Rose could pick circles around the Chicks." Anyway, I just loved this Wild Rose period picture.

ACOUSTIC CHEESECAKE

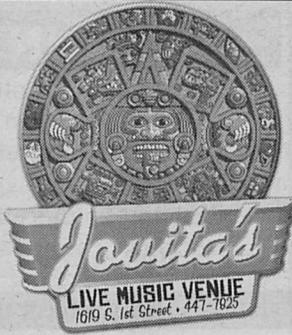
Back in March, *John The Revelator* mentioned getting an astonishing amount of come hither email in the runup to *Folk Alliance*. This shot of **Amilia K Spicer** (see Reviews) was just one of the eyecatchers.

NOT THE COVER OF THE SEPTEMBER ISSUE

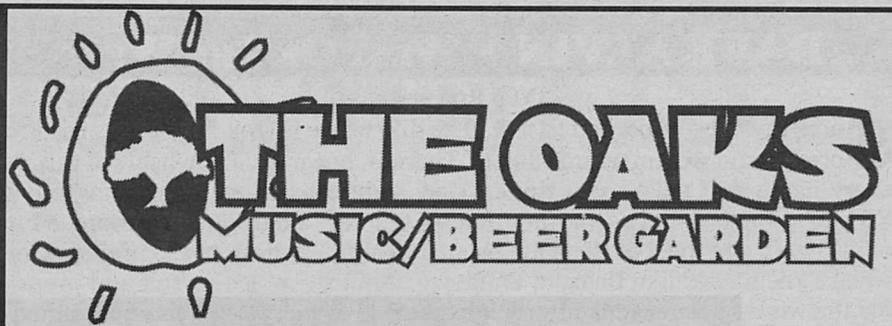
Kerry Hock of Americana Photography sent me this fabulous La Pasionara action pic of **Carrie Luz Rodriguez**, but she has a thing about live shots and doesn't want me to use it. I could defy her, but... well maybe not.



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 Tue 25th Ethan Azzarian (6.30) Larry Lange & His Lonely Knights (8)
 Fri 28th El Tule (6) Ryan T Briggs (7.30) San Saba (9.30)
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 Sun 30th Flying A's (6)



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DAVE ALVIN • WEST OF THE WEST

(Yep Roc ***.5)

Someone once remarked to me, "The difference is, you Europeans read the credits and we Americans don't." There is, however, a downside to this, for every name that makes you think, "Gee, some guy called Hancock wrote all Ely's best songs," there's another that's a red flag, a harbinger of doom, a bird of ill-omen, and most of them are producers. I try, honest, not to prejudge, but when I see names like Benson, Stamey or Ambel, I brace myself and prepare for the worst. For reasons utterly inexplicable to me, Greg Leisz has gained a stellar reputation, albeit confined to the West Coast, but if you think no one, except maybe Dave Alvin, can fuck up a Dave Alvin album, think again. The basic premise here is that Alvin, a fourth generation Californian, has assembled an eclectic group of songs about the Golden State, John Stewart's *California Bloodlines*, Jackson Brown's *Redneck Friend*, Merle Haggard's *Kern River*, Tom Waits' *Blind Love*, Kate Wolf's *Here In California*, Richard Berry & The Soul Searchers' *I Am Bewildered*, Blackie Farrell's *Sonora's Death Row*, Los Lobos' *Down On The Riverbed*, Alvin & Tom Russell's *Between The Cracks*, John Fogerty's *Don't Look Now*, Jim Ringer's *Tramps And Hawkers*, The Grateful Dead's *Loser* and Brian Wilson's *Surfer Girl*. So far so avoidance of the obvious good, though, as it's been recorded by Tom Russell, Robert Earl Keen, Michael Martin Murphey, Leo Kottke and others, some may find Yep Roc's description of *Sonora's Death Row* as an "unearthed gem from a previously overlooked talent" a little odd. I have to say for Leisz that each individual track sounds great, the problem is, they all sound exactly the same, even the Beach Boys number. The material is fine, Alvin and his musicians, including Chris Miller, Chris Gaffney and Danny Barnes, are in top form, but all the songs are slow tempo and, with 13 of them, you feel like you're listening to one continuous dirge, and when it's over, you won't remember anything about it because there isn't enough texture to provide a grip. **JC**

SLAID CLEAVES • UNSUNG

(Rounder ***.5)

Not knowing the details of Cleaves' deal with Rounder, and being too polite to ask, I don't know if, like Ray Wylie Hubbard's *Delirium Tremolos*, which might just as well have been called 'Contractual Obligation,' this is the last album he owes them, but where Hubbard had a couple of throwaway originals among somewhat superfluous versions of Greatest Hits by wellknown contemporaries, such as James McMurtry's *Choctaw Bingo*, all of Cleaves' 13 songs are by other singer-songwriters, most of them, with the exception of David Olney, a rung or three below him on the career ladder. The title is, presumably, a reference to those writers rather than their songs as several, that I know of, have been recorded before, but while I'm sure all the people he covers are delighted to have an artist as talented as Cleaves cut their songs, whether as demos or reinterpretations, the crux for the listener is how often the credits get consulted, how often you really want to know who wrote that song. The clear winners here are Adam Carroll (*Race Car Joe*), Karen Poston (*Flowered Dresses*) and Michael O'Connor (the outstanding *Getaway Car*), trailed by Malvern Taylor (*Working Stiff*). Though Cleaves does a predictably fine job of getting inside and delivering the others, there are some moments when even the most charitable, let alone those tired of playing 'Spot The Influence,' might wonder if there's not a reason some of these songwriters are still obscure. **JC**

RICHARD DOBSON ON THISTLEDOWN WIND

(Brambus [Switzerland] ****)

Nanci Griffith, who covered his *Ballad Of Robin Wintersmith*, once called Dobson "the Hemingway of country music." I once called him "the invisible man of Texas singer-songwriters." Griffith was, of course, referring to his rough-hewn literacy, I was remarking on the fact that despite playing alongside Townes Van Zandt, Guy Clark and Mickey Newbury in the late 60s/early 70s Houston songwriter scene and having some early successes, David Allan Coe recording *Piece Of Wood And Steel*, Carlene Carter & Dave Edmunds *Baby Ride Easy*, his name somehow failed to register. There are probably many Guy Clark fans who would be astonished to learn that Dobson cowrote the title track of *Old Friends*. However, if the Tyler, TX, born troubadour has little recognition in his home state, he does have the unswerving loyalty of Brambus, which has been putting out his albums, including reissues of his LPs, since 1993 (he's had one US release, in 1994, on Austin's Sundown Records, quite possibly the shortest lived label ever in a notoriously ephemeral business). Having made 16 of them over the last 30 years, anything Dobson doesn't know about recording albums isn't worth knowing, and *Thistledown*, featuring Thomm Jutz (guitars, mandolin, keyboards, harmonies), Pat McInerney (drums, percussion), Fats Kaplin (fiddle, pedal steel, guitar, accordion), LeAnn Etheridge (bass, harmonies), Catherine Craig (harmonies) and Sergio Webb (electric guitar, lap steel), with David Olney sitting in on harmonica for two tracks, could be taught in a master class on craftsmanship, sequencing, texture, changeups, all the things that make an album a pleasure to listen to. **JC**

JOHNNY CASH • PERSONAL FILE

(Columbia/Legacy double CD ***.5)

So I drove from San Antonio to Austin, drove round delivering the June issue and this album ended just as I pulled back into the 3CM Towers parking lot. OK, an exaggeration, but at some point you start to feel that you've been listening to this all your life, and start wondering why, because it really isn't any good. The answer, of course, is that it's by Johnny Cash, and, by God, you're going to like it if it kills you. The selling point for this 49-track double album is that Cash cut the prototype of *American Recordings* in his living room 20 years before the world was ready, but the reality can be found in one of his intros, which, incidentally, are far and away the best things on the album. At some point, and I'm damned if I'm going to go through it again to find his exact words, he talks about songs he didn't feel ready to record or which his record label didn't want him to record, which, I must say, speaks well of Columbia's A&R in the early 70s because most of the material is pretty dreadful, Cash revealing a weakness for Irish schmaltz and lame story songs. Tell you what, I have two copies of this thing, an advance version and the real one and I'll trade them both for a copy of *Johnny 99*. Call me. **JC**

FRED J EAGLESMITH • MILLY'S CAFE

(A Major Label ***.5)

Nice bit of transparency on the one-sheet for Eaglesmith's 16th album—"87,000 CDs sold in the last 15 years." Though *Live From The Paradise Motel* (Barbed Wire, 1994), the first on CD, first released in the US and how I originally came across him (*MCT #80* cover story), isn't included in the official website discography, assuming that real Fredheads have complete sets of the rest, not unreasonable if you've ever been to an Eaglesmith show, this means there are over 6000 of them. An interesting number, on the one hand any roots act would kill for so many hard-core fans, on the other, it explains why Eaglesmith, quite possibly the most financially successful, hardest working and resourceful roots touring artist in North America—dig the merch action at any show—is on A Major Label rather than a major label. Given that he's in almost perpetual motion, the astonishing thing about Eaglesmith's prolific output is the quality of the material. When he was touring *Guitar Town*, Steve Earle told me, "The problem is, I'm not writing any new songs. I mean, all I have to write about is travelling around on a bus that cost more than most people's homes and who gives a shit?" Eaglesmith's muse, however, seems to come along for the ride and his ten new songs, most notably *Kansas*, are as fine as anything he's done. That said, Eaglesmith's studio albums always seem one-dimensional compared to the live ones. I've always thought that he could easily have made a living, probably an even better living, as a stand-up comedian and raconteur and what I want is to hear him play these songs with the trademark intros, some of which are longer than the songs themselves, which make an Eaglesmith show such an experience. Still, telling Fredheads to wait for *Official Bootleg* versions is pretty much pissing in the wind. **JC**

THE COMING GRASS BEAUTY OF A HEART RUBY DEE & THE SNAKEHANDLERS NORTH OF BAKERSFIELD

(Velvet Ed ***.5/Dionysus ***.5)

Sometimes a band name can tell you pretty much what to expect, I mean to say, what part of Strawberry Alarm Clock, Go Cat Go!, New Model Army or Carcass don't you understand? Then again, it might tell you absolutely nothing, might even be produced by any one of the many random band name generators on the Net. Anyway, to me The Coming Grass would suggest, obviously enough, bluegrass, but in fact the Portland, Maine, band using the name is well, I'm not really sure what you call folk-pop heavily influenced by the sound of *Gimme Shelter*, with a female drummer, Ginger Cate, who can sound like Keith Moon. The band's greatest strength is, of course, Sara Cox, who, though heard to best advantage on her own albums, shares the singing and writing with her guitarist/producer husband Nate Schrock.

◆ Clear across the country, in Seattle, Washington, Ruby Dee Philippa's band name doesn't immediately imply anything much, but the album title is a dead giveaway to the illuminati. Abbreviated to "rockin' honky-tonk combo," the hi-energy five piece "plays an Americana that encompasses alt.country, honky-tonk, Bakersfield 'hard' country to Memphis rockabilly, Western Swing, Pacific Northwest insurgent country, Tex-Mex to rock & roll." An ambitious palette, to be sure, but Philippa's eleven strong originals, plus The Beat Farmers' *Make It Last*, would paint a pretty convincing picture if it wasn't for a marked tendency to crowd her Molly O'Day/early Dolly Parton-ish vocals. This is highlighted by *I Remember You*, the one track not produced by Conrad Uno & guitarist Jorge Harada, which rather suggests that Michael Shrieve should have been in charge of the whole thing. Philippa punches through most of the time, but this would have been an even better album if she didn't have to. **JC**



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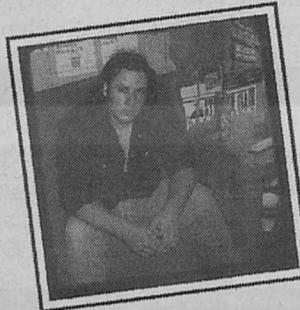
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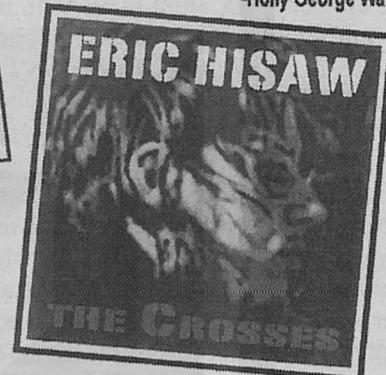
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INTRODUCING MISS LAUREN MARIE

(Texas Jamboree ****)

Her one-sheet says that Cape Cod, MA, her home town, "isn't really known for turning out rockabilly and honky tonk singers." Well, Miss Lauren Marie, welcome to Austin, which isn't really known for supporting rockabilly and honky tonk singers. While Marti Brom left a niche open when she moved to DC, those, as I remarked of Jessie Lee Miller, are some mighty elegant pumps to fill and Lauren Marie has a bit of an infrastructure problem. On the one hand, she didn't have to go to Finland to find a label, on the other, she doesn't have a support system comparable to that provided to Brom by High Noon. There are some excellent players on her album, notably guitarist Dave Leroy Biller and pianist T Jarrod Bonta, and some solid material, Wynonie Harris' *Just Like Two Drops Of Water*, Roy Orbison's *Sweet And Easy To Love*, Don Gibson's *Who Cares*, Pat Boone's *Moody River*, Willie Nelson's *How Long Is Forever*, Bing Crosby's *Three Little Words*, Billy Walker's *The Last Kiss Is The Sweetest* and Dorsey & Johnny Burnette's *Believe What You Say*, with three originals by producer Bobby Horton and one by Eric Laufer of The Two Timin' Three, but while Lauren Marie has a lovely voice and a convincing feel for this vintage material, she keeps so far inside her comfort zone that you can't even guess where the edges might be. Like all Fort Horton productions, the sound is rather muffled, though nothing like as muddy as on some albums, which wouldn't matter so much if this wasn't such a bizarre contradiction in terms—a cautious rockabilly album. Being a wild woman isn't enough on its own, but you'd think someone who says she's been listening to Johnny Burnette, the archetypal rockabilly wildman, since she was 14 would breathe a little more fire. A charming album, indeed very charming, but short on swagger. **JC**

MICHAEL ONEILL • WHO'S BAD NOW

(Sleeping Trout ***.5)

Earlier this year, well in advance of his album's release, Oneill prepaid for six months worth of ads and, even at rates geared to the financial resources of Austin musicians, ie rock fucking bottom, this amounted to a useful lump of money. Now, as I may well be the world's most useless salesman, ads for album releases have almost always been taken out by artists or labels with whom I have some history and who are fairly confident that I will turn the light of my countenance on their project, but Oneill's campaign came completely out of the blue. I had no connection with him, in fact had never heard of him before, so hadn't the vaguest idea what to expect when, with the check long since cashed, the moment of truth finally arrived. In a situation like this, there are really only two ways it can go, either the album's a complete dud, in which case the publisher (JC) tells the editor (also JC) to quietly ignore it on the grounds that ripping someone a new asshole after taking their money is somewhat discourteous, or both of me breathe a sigh of relief. Whew.

So we're good to go, but at this point I usually try and get a fix on people I know little or nothing about by decoding their press kit or website content, but with Oneill this is not easy—the most informative thing on his website is a very enigmatic piece by one Evan Brubaker: "Fifteen years ago, Oneill was a man on the run, trying to outrun success and a string of hits, brawls and lawsuits that threatened to drag him straight offstage to the slammer... only Oneill knows for sure why he walked away from it all leaving unanswered lawsuits and questions... Having returned to America with his court records sealed and his conscience clean... He waves away questions about the past..."

Okaaay... Well, I do know Oneill's based in Gig Harbor, Washington, that his album features Seattle-area country musicians and that, mounting a very unusual, for a self-releasing artist, full scale, long term press, radio and Internet blitz, he's a professional, with a professional piece of work to match. If that implies a certain level of calculation, well, yes, it's obvious a lot of thought has gone into this.

I have to say that the title track which opens and, in an unplugged version, closes the album, "A sassy, funky strut, very tongue in cheek, a big grin," doesn't do a whole lot for me, but, sounding a bit like a country-rock version of Don Williams, between the two Oneill treads a very fine line between commercial and roots country with *Chance*, *Cowboy Ride*, *96 Tears* (a referential original, not the ? & The Mysterians classic), *River To The Sea* and *Better*. The only problem with *Austin* is "Both barrels blazing while burning rubber down a two-lane asphalt road"—Michael, have you actually driven in Austin recently?

Where Oneill may, and should, have a real winner, though, is *I Don't Remember*, about a former honky tonk habitué who can't recall those days since he got married. This is a song that could have eternal life as a wedding anniversary request on country radio. If, that is, he can get country radio to play his album.

Oneill's calculation, it seems to me, is that his fine line will allow him to overlap into both the more adventurous side of commercial and the more conventional side of roots country, rather than slip through the crack between them. One thing for sure, he's doing everything he can to make it happen. **JC**

JOHNNY EDSON • MORE THAN FRIENDS

(Ragweed ****)

Usually, when I come up with the first sentence, the angle of approach, the rest of a review rolls out pretty easy, but after thinking about Edson's fifth album for a while, I started knocking up against a concept that was far too large and complex. I may come back to the question I started asking myself—why the hell do people make records anyway?—another time, but, in Edson's case at least, the answer is fairly simple, he does it for his own satisfaction. Now retired, after making or a bob or two in real estate, Edson was once active in the Austin scene, with Uncle Uh Huh & The Uh Huhs and Dad Gum Swing, but if he ever gave much consideration to a musical career, he's long past that now and his solo work has been devoted to making music for its own sake, indeed he'd regard it as a miracle if he ever sold enough albums to cover the cost of making them. This, as you can imagine, is very liberating. For his latest batch of "rhythm and jive in a swing groove," he's enlisted no less than 24 friends from the whole span of his music making, buddies from early, ukulele-playing, days in Beaumont, such as Swamp Pop/jazz saxman Jimmy Simmons, now President of Lamar University, and symphony (Southeast Texas/Lake Charles) violinist Ellen Reinstra, to A-list Austin players and long time colleagues like Floyd Domino, Cindy Cashdollar, Chip Dolan and Asleep At The Wheel's rhythm section (David Miller & Dave Sanger). Starting off with a swing revision of Antonio Carlos Jobim's Bossa Nova *Meditation*, *Wabash Blues* from Bob Wills' version and Merle Kilgore's *Wolverton Mountain*, songs that, respectively, taught Edson how to keep lyrics to the point, passing chords and how important a sense of humor is in songwriting, the other 11 tracks are Edson's own "weird stuff," including a couple of instrumentals and one number, *On Your Dial*, that seems destined to become a DJ theme song. But wait, that's not all! Absolutely free of charge, you also get a bonus CD, **Favorites From The First Four**, 20 tracks culled from *Johnny Edson* (1994), *A Spread Misère* (1997), *Hob Nobbin' With The Hoi Polloi* (2001) and *A Man's Gotta Eat* (2004). Meticulously produced, engineered and mixed by Figment's Rick DeLellis, this is an album whose booklet features a fair amount of grey hair, but as the Irish say, "The older the fiddle, the sweeter the tune." **JC**

RUSSELL BARTLETT • TEXAS SMELLS

(Republic of Texas ****)

Mickey Newbury once said, "Russ is a poet... If you can listen without becoming a fan then, friend, you just ain't human." Bartlett, who started out in Seattle grunge before moving to Texas and reinventing himself as a singer-songwriter, has progressed from his early 'school of Townes Van Zandt' style, at which, to be fair, he showed considerably more aptitude than most, but, like so many Texas singer-songwriters, he's very hard to position. I could say that he has a way with words, arrangements and melodies, but if you asked "So, where would you place him on a scale that rated, let's say, James McMurtry or David Rodriguez at 10 and Kevin Fowler or Cory Morrow at zero?" well, that's not so easy. We plunge now into an area fraught with nuance, fine gradations and just plain ol' personal taste. I guess what I like most about Bartlett is that he never makes me wince, and let me tell you, pilgrim, if you think that sounds like damning with faint praise, not making me wince once during a whole album is pretty unusual, hell, McMurtry and Rodriguez have both made me cringe at shoddy structure or pissant conceits. Backed on his fifth album by Ron Flynt, who also produced, Jud Newcomb, Chip Dolan, Erik Hokkanen and Penny Jo Pullus on ten songs that run the gamut from humor to poignancy, Bartlett acts like a man with a plan, quietly building a reputation one album at a time rather than thinking he can take the world by storm. You can argue with Mickey Newbury if you want, I ain't about to. **JC**

AMILIA K SPICER • SEAMLESS

(Free Range ****)

First time I heard Spicer, singing Peter Case's *Never Coming Home* on the **A Case For Case** tribute album, I thought "this girl is either very good or very clever," and catching the end of a set at Folk Alliance didn't help me decide which which was which. There is, of course, a third possibility, that she's both. One argument against 'very clever' is her quixotic, and patently doomed, attempt to have people write about 'amilia k. spicer,' when you'd think just getting them to spell her first name right (or wrong, depending how you look at it) would keep her busy enough. This pointless affectation aside, Spicer is a remarkable singer, with a sultry, sensual, smoky, silky voice, and she writes smart, intelligent folk-pop songs. In her brimming press kit, there's one phrase, from *Performing Songwriter*, that really nails it, "controlled simplicity." There's a faint whiff of Daniel Lanois that keeps me from being as bowled over as the dozens of writers quoted in that press kit, but Spicer undeniably stands out among the hordes of Girls with Guitars. Well, she actually plays a Korg electric piano, but you know what I mean. Given that she's also a cutie patootie, it's a little odd that all this praise doesn't seem to have lifted her out of the ruck yet. **JC**

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- July 26 The Oaks, Manor TX
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EMBRACING FAN FAIR WHAT A LONG, STRANGE MONTH IT'S BEEN IN NASHVILLE

It's been six years since the folks at the Country Music Association decided to scuttle their long-running Fan Fair at the Nashville Fairgrounds in favor of a new event in the downtown area renamed the CMA Music Festival. And yet with more half a decade under our belts to get used to it, try as we might Nashvillians can't seem to add the name change to our local vernacular.

I paid special attention to this last month during my conversation with locals as the festival was taking place, and it seemed anyone I spoke to that week was saying Fan Fair, rather than the current proper name. It was usually something like, "don't even think about driving downtown this week because Fan Fair is in town" (our aversion to the traffic is not surprising. When the event was at the fairgrounds, it was isolated from the rest of us. Now it clogs up the main thoroughfare to the heart of our city).

As best I can figure, our difficulty with the name change comes from force of habit. We just got so used to saying Fan Fair for so many years. Plus, it's more work to say CMA Music Festival, and we're laid back Southerners.

But whatever you call it, the fact is that attitudes in Nashville seem to be changing about the CMA's huge annual gathering. When all of the revisions were first announced prior to the 2001 festival, many in town (including me) were highly skeptical. We wondered if fans who had gone for years would accept the move to downtown. We weren't sure it was good for the city to crowd the traffic flow that also went to our primary business district with so many additional people. There was also talk on the CMA's part about seemingly radical changes to end the trend at the time of flagging attendances, such as including acts from other musical genres to concert bills and adding meet-and-greets with *sopa opera* stars.

Fortunately, that silly bullshit didn't happen, and any resistance on the part of out of towners seems to have disappeared. Festival organizers announced that this year's crowds were the largest ever. They give what they call aggregate attendance figures, which means every person who went through a paid gate at any show. That number was as 161,000 for this year, up from last year's figure of 145,000. Granted, the aggregate number is a little

CHARLES EARLE'S B-Sides

deceiving. People who paid for a full festival ticket were counted for each show they attended, so the CMA is obviously padding the numbers a bit for PR purposes, as they have always done, but the fact that the numbers were up is a good sign anyway.

One of the big reasons for the improvements is the industry itself. If you go back to the latter part of the 90s, when Fan Fair numbers began to fall for the first time ever, the reasons were obvious to most of us in town. The industry was completely top-heavy, with the likes of Faith, Tim, Shania and Garth, and one of the biggest problems was that these artists were not even showing up for Fan Fair because they were selling so many records that they didn't need the promotion. But this year's event featured a list of artists that included Brad Paisley, Kenny Chesney, Keith Urban, Dierks Bentley, Sugarland, Martina McBride and many other top sellers, along with plenty of the younger acts in our industry trying to establish a following.

I'd also add that having the largest of the shows at LP Field, where the Tennessee Titans play, is a vast improvement over the Fan Fair digs at the fairgrounds. The Nashville Speedway, where the larger shows were housed in previous years, is an absolute dump that had insufficient concessions and limited seating. LP Field holds 68,000 for Titans games every fall. The logistical improvements are obvious.

All things considered, the fans are getting a whole lot more bang for their buck.

As for me personally, I'd fallen into the rut of avoiding downtown for the last year or two during the festival, but two friends who live in a high rise downtown convinced me to come for a visit and spend several hours among the crowds. What the heck, I figured, and I'm glad I did.

The crowds seemed slightly more wordly, and I am guessing that reflects a better quality of music coming out of Nashville. I spent about 20 minutes chatting with two women from Washington, DC who were both accountants at a big firm there. Aside from the obligatory straw cowboy hats, they seemed as far from any hillbilly stereotypes as you could get. They'd never attended before, but listed off a few artists that were their favorites. They had a room at our downtown Hilton and were planning on moving among the various sites on foot to watch music all day and into the night.

That's much of what we encountered. Gone were the frightening number of Winnebagos that filled the parking lot at the fairgrounds (at least they weren't in plain sight near downtown). What we saw was just a bunch of folks who were enthusiastic about country music. There were some who dressed way over the top, with the Daisy Duke shorts and sparkles and silly western shirts. But there were also plenty of people who just looked like it was business casual day at an insurance office.

All in all, I have to say I feel much better about Fan Fair, er, I mean CMA Music Festival, these days.

RETURN OF THE BONAROONIES

Okay, so another event I've spent plenty of time making fun of in recent years is Bonaroo, the enormous music festival that takes place over the course of a weekend in mid June in Manchester, TN, just an hour or so southeast of Nashville. I've poked fun because it started as a massive hippie jam band festival, a big raging stink that I was afraid to be only an hour away from.

And that's what it was for the first year or two. The roster of performers featured Galactic, Disco Biscuits, Widespread Panic and a whole bunch of other bands that don't have a song any shorter than ten or fifteen minutes. Throw in a huge crowd with limited restroom/wash facilities and lots of patchouli oil, and you get my drift.

But over the course of the last five years things have changed a bit. Actually, let's just say that the music has improved. This year's event featured Tom Petty, Elvis Costello, Bonnie Raitt, Radiohead, Cat Power, Son Volt and many other acts that non-stoners actually enjoy. And hats off to the organizers, who have managed to create a hugely successful event. The 2005 event took in over \$13 million, a figure that was only topped by two U2 stadium shows in Europe for the highest grossing event of the year. Numbers for this year should be even higher.

As for the crowd, it has remained the same demographic. The local alternative weekly paper in Nashville ran one article on how to get into Bonaroo without getting busted for possession, another about the first fan on site who had hitchhiked in a few weeks in advance and was sleeping under a tarp on the side of the road. Former Dead bassist Phil Lesh hung around and played the Ryman in Nashville the night after Bonaroo ended. My friends who live downtown had to walk through his crowd on the way to dinner. Imagine the people I mentioned earlier after multiple days of baking in the sun with no showers. My friend Skip said it was the worst body odor he has ever smelled.

One negative note—a fan attending Bonaroo was struck and killed by a bus on the Friday of the festival weekend. In a sad and weird twist of irony, the fan was killed by the tour bus of Ricky Skaggs, the famed bluegrass musician who was on the way to perform at the show. There was no wrongdoing on the part of Skagg's bus driver. The victim wandered out into traffic on I-24, near the festival. This comes after deaths at the last two Bonaroos by overdose victims.

JUST SOME GOOD OLD BOYS...

If all of this festival news wasn't enough for you, here is a number that genuinely astounded me: the CMT DukeFest, a celebration of the Dukes of Hazard television show, drew over 100,000 people at the Nashville Fairgrounds during the first weekend in June. Police estimates had it at the largest ever crowd at the fairgrounds. More than 100 people showed up in replicas of the General Lee car from the show. All of the cast members from the show were on hand for performances or autographs. The fact that a 27 year old TV show can draw this kind of crowd really does boggle my mind.

LUCILLE WRITER

A MAJOR STONER

Harold 'Hal' Bynum, the songwriter who wrote the number one hit *Lucille*, was busted last month in the cushy Green Hills neighborhood of Nashville for growing 256 pot plants in his house. He and his wife were charged and released on bond. Bynum, 72, has also had cuts with Patty Loveless, Johnny Cash, Waylon Jennings and Jim Reeves. Too bad he couldn't have unloaded his stash on the Bonaroo crowd before the cops arrived.

WANNA BUY A MAGAZINE

It was announced last month that *Country Weekly*, the glossy celebrity magazine of country music, is one of a handful of titles being offered for sale by American Media, Inc. *Country Weekly* is the last national country music publication in the United States. There were eight similar publications during the 90s, so the buyer should beware of a dying species.

AND FINALLY...

As you may have read, Keith Urban married Nicole Kidman in a ceremony in Australia last month. The couple then jetted off to the south pacific for a honeymoon. They plan to live in Nashville, which should produce all sorts of interesting celebrity sightings.

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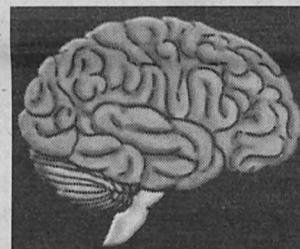
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JOHN THE REVEALATOR

Couple of things from last month, the main one being that, though it was billed on the cover, there was no **Charles Earle's B-Sides** on the inside. Charles got blindsided by a family tragedy which derailed him so badly he not only couldn't write a column, he didn't even get round to letting me know I wouldn't be getting one until after the mag was printed. So, I'd sent off all the other pages, then realized something had gone badly wrong and it was Plan B time. During the leadup to the 200th issue, I put together a list of all the *Music City/Music City Texas/3CM* cover stories without really knowing what, if anything, I'd do with it, so I stuck that in, hoping it was more than just filler. As the first response was from Sylvia Benini, one of the original Gang of Three founders of *Music City*, saying it was time for me to write The Book, and the second said I should have put issue dates in to show just how far ahead of the curve the mag has always been, I guess there was enough content to justify it.

◆ The smaller one was that when I placed the editorial, I couldn't think of a catchy headline and hoped inspiration would strike later, but never got back to it, so it ran with the previous month's headline. I fixed this in the email edition with '**Just A Soul Whose Intentions Are Good**,' a reference, of course, to The Animals' *Please Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood*.

◆ I hadn't thought of **Chris Farlowe** in donkey's years until I mentioned him in last month's Albert Lee review (Lee started out in Farlowe's The Thunderbirds), but was reminded of him when *National Review* ran a list of 50 Conservative Rock Songs, which got a fair bit of press (if you didn't catch any of it, #1 was The Who's *I Won't Get Fooled Again*, #2 The Beatles' *Taxman*, #3 The Rolling Stones' *Sympathy For The Devil*). As far as I know, Farlowe never qualified for inclusion but, despite being one of the best R&B singers Britain ever produced, more than able to hold his own alongside Otis Redding and Eric Burden on a memorable *Old Grey Whistle Test*, he sank himself and forfeited his reputation by opening a Nazi memorabilia store in London. Even the most conservative or apolitical of his admirers couldn't deal with that.

◆ A side issue in the to and fro about **Bruce Springsteen** being #1 in the FAR chart (see editorial) was whether his album merited such an honor, regardless of label. Not having heard any of **We Shall Overcome**, I have no dog in this fight, but while many FARsters reported it, nine as their Album of the Month for May, of the considerably more who didn't, some were harshly critical, "just won't cut it no matter whose name he sticks on the cover," "sucks," "mediocre at best," "awful... overwrought, overplayed and overly self-important. A piece of bombast." "I listened to some, not all, of it completely because the FARsters rated it so highly. I was, frankly, surprised—and not in a good way. It's basically a recorded jam session. Good pickers for sure but way too many of them and it didn't seem like anything special to me. Only because it has Bruce's name on it did it go anywhere." "It struck out pretty fast with me. Maybe well-intentioned, but certainly overdone and too gussied-up to be real. I couldn't stand the thing." "How do you manage to make an album that's unrehearsed and overproduced at the same time?"

◆ Stepping back a little, one Springsteen supporter did provide some perspective. "John, do you get goose-bumps when you hear 'The screen door slams, Mary's dress waves, like a vision she dances across the porch as the radio plays...'? Let's assume the answer is no. Many of your DJs, however, grew up (musically, emotionally) under a Bruce filter. How can this not color their judgement?" To answer the question, no, I don't get goose-bumps from *Thunder Road*. Like everyone else, I admired the hell out **Nebraska**, but otherwise Springsteen is no big thing to me. Gene Vincent? Now you're talkin'...

◆ Bit of a burst of **Butch Hancockiana** over the last few weeks. First, a **3CM** subscriber sent me copies of Butch er, um, well either collectibles or bootlegs depending how you, or Butch, look at it. **Early Recordings; Harrod Music Company, Lubbock, Texas, 1974** is the more interesting, at least in a very specific context. Kimmie Rhodes once said that Hancock "throws away better songs than most folks will ever write," and he threw away all but two of these 14, cut when he was about 19, *Little Coyote Waltz* and *I Wish I Was Only Workin'*, which were on his first album, though **Jimmie Dale Gilmore** later ran with *When The Nights Are Cold*. **Split Rail, Austin, Texas 14 June, 1977** features more familiar material, but the sound quality leaves something to be desired.

◆ How you lay your hands on copies of these suckers is your problem, somewhat easier is some great video of **Butch Hancock** in the early 90s. Clive 'Slim' Pain, who's featured playing accordion, says "I've just put some film up at www.youtube.com/watch?v=qVbCeZJPfrM (good luck with that) of Butch, Jimmie [Dale Gilmore], and Jesse [Taylor]. It was Jesse's first solo show in the UK. The three of them were touring and they had one day off. Jesse asked me to arrange a gig, and I got him one at The Cricketers and pulled together a band for him. Butch & Jimmie were told by their management to stay away and rest, but of course they ignored that and came down to join in the fun. It's rare footage of Butch singing [*Tell Me What You Know*] without a guitar and doing the Rock Star bit."

◆ One thing I discovered when I started collecting birthdays for the monthly *Arrivals & Departures* calendar is that even some roots musicians, Joe Ely, Rosie Flores and Kent Dykes for instance, are coy about their age, which I've never understood. I mean, after a certain point, who gives a shit anymore? However, **Butch Hancock** makes no bones about turning 61 on July 12th, and will be celebrating by singing 61 songs over two nights (July 13th & 14th) at Cactus Cafe.

◆ There are various versions of this, the one I know best is, of course, "I didn't know what an editor was and now I am one." This came to mind in the credits for The Ginn Sisters' **Blood Oranges**, "Producers and Engineered by **Bradley Kopp**." I thought, well, at least, the music industry's bottom line, they spelled his name right, but immediately below is 'Executive Producer Bill Passalacqua.'

◆ Reader Tom Wells "couldn't help but note the news of **Cecil Moore's** death. I grew up in Luling and knew Cecil. One job he held was as a filling station attendant and a lot of us would go down to the station at night and he would play some, but mainly just tell stories Believe it or not, one idea he had for his band right after *Diamondback* came out, was for each of them to go kill an armadillo, clean the shell out real good, then wear them as band helmets when they went on stage to play. He figured they could change their name to the 'Dillos.' I swear I'm not making this up."

◆ You may have heard that "country radio is not playing" **The Dixie Chicks'** new album, but while it makes for great press, this seems to be not actually true, as such. Though they're getting action on Adult Contemporary, Hot Adult Contemporary and Triple A, country radio is still the leading format playing the Chicks, and some country stations are getting a little pissed about being cast as reactionary rednecks. Still, why should the girls care when they have the mighty force of the **Americana Music Association** behind them? In a spectacularly opportunistic move, the AMA has nominated *Not Ready To Make Nice* as a Song of the Year, presumably hoping the Chicks will actually show up to accept the award. Just one thing stands between them and this dream—James McMurtry's *We Can't Make It Here*. How will they fix the vote? Are today's news stories worth tomorrow's mass defections?

Time will tell, but meanwhile I figure that not renewing my initial membership means some \$300 I haven't pissed down this particular rathole.

WHY 3CM? PART 3

And last. I just had a couple left that I couldn't squeeze in before,

MARY BATTIATA (Arlington, VA)

My most memorable and valuable discoveries made as a result of subscribing to **3CM: Dayna Kurtz, Gurf Morlix, Troy Campbell** and, most recently, **Bill Passalacqua**. I now have two of the Passalacqua CDs (ditto Kurtz, Morlix and Campbell, come to think of it.) There are two songs in particular of Passalacqua's that have stayed in my memory, *Willie Foster* and *Butterfly*. The former, astonishing, the latter, just plain beautiful.

DONNIE AULT (Madison, WI)

When Robin and I made one of our all-too-infrequent visits back to Austin, where we lived from 1982 to 1985, in 1989, our first stop was, of course, *Texicali Grille*. Trying to figure out who to see while in town, we picked up an oddly shaped, cheap looking free publication entitled *Music City #4*. Most of it was taken up with exactly what we needed, a calendar of who was playing where and when, but it also included reviews of locally released tapes, LPs, and CDs.

Once back in Madison, I decided to subscribe to *Music City* and in the 16 years since then JC has introduced me to many musicians and albums that have become favorites. I would have eventually discovered the **Cornell Hurd Band** once Danny Young joined it, but I might never have known of the existence of a few (**Mandy Mercier, David Rodriguez, Blaze Foley**) who were in Austin when I lived there but I somehow missed, others (**Jimmy LaFave, Toni Price, Fred Eaglesmith**) who have since gone on to wider fame, some (like **Cody Hubach**) who I heard of through **3CM** and can't recall reading about anywhere else, and a miscellaneous mess of favorites at various levels of fame that include **Terry Clarke, Calvin Russell, Cary Swinney, Martí Brom (!), James Hand** (I have a copy of *Shadows Where The Magic Was*), **Jo Carol Pierce, Dave Alvin** (of whom I was ignorant, hard as that may be to believe), **James Intveld, Charline Arthur, Chris Wall** (especially **Tainted Angel**), and it was John who clued me into the fact that there was a hell of a lot more to **Ray Wylie Hubbard** than *Redneck Mother*.

Without *Music City*, despite **Butch Hancock's** reputation, I doubt that I would have become the possessor of all 14 volumes of his **No 2 Alike** tape series (not to mention the accompanying photo-songbook, from which nothing could make me part.

Finally, without John's persistent rave reviews in the face of total silence from the rest of the American press, I know I never would have purchased a CD (his seventh being my first 'What the hell, I'll check it out') by the most egregiously neglected great Texas singer-songwriter of the 90s, **William James IV**, nor would I have written him a note about his music, which led to me becoming his friend and his drafting me to be his totally useless Midwest representative.

A second finally: I value John as a critic because he owns a pair of ears and a brain, both of which he uses when evaluating music rather than basing his opinions on advertising or trends and because he is willing and able to use fancy words he probably learned in that British public school he attended in the same sentence with 'fucking' and 'turd' He's sometimes a little ruder than I could allow myself to be when reviewing the works of people he actually knows, but he has integrity, or honesty, whatever you want to call it, and without JC and **3CM**, I would be unaware of a lot of my favorite music and the last 16 years of my life would have been a lot duller.\



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CAN BRUCE HANDLE THE PRESTIGE?

Deadline looming, I had to go back in and rewrite the first para of last month's cover story because the original version referred to Bruce Springsteen being #4 in the April FAR chart, exceptional enough for a major label release, but then **We Shall Overcome** went and surged to #1 for May. This unprecedented encroachment stirred up the FAR community more than somewhat. Reactions ranged from "I was appalled. As a matter of personal and station policy I never play major label albums" to "So a major label put out a good record, get over it" (though see *John The Revelator* for some dissent).

I take the pragmatic point, but as radio is not a level playing field—most stations won't even accept self-released albums—my sympathies are with the principled stand. Right at the beginning, I toyed with the idea of banning major label releases, more as a statement of what FAR is about than anything, but the argument against such a move is well put by Bill Keith (*Dirt Roads*, WSDP, Plymouth/Canton, MI): "If we removed the majors from contention, we would be protecting the best of the indies from serious competition. Under the current system, it means so much more when indies knock off the big guys."

Over the course of 82 charts, major label releases have been fairly anomalous, heavily outnumbered by indie and self releases, and, up to now, never got very high (same applies to 'Texas Music,' thank God). One FARster pointed out that there were six others in the May chart, but they were much more typical, the next highest being at #13. Put it this way, between them, the majors had a 10% market share in FAR #82, almost all their entries getting soundly beaten out by albums with minimal promotion and publicity.

Given how many albums the majors release, I guess it was just a matter of time before one of them resonated with freeform roots DJs, and it'll probably be another six+ years before it happens again. There aren't many major label artists who have the desire to make a roots album, enough clout to get it released (I imagine it had to be shoved down a few corporate throats—"Pete who?") and enough residual credibility to have people like the FAR reporters give it a listen.

My own position, as usual, is somewhere between pragmatic and principled. With the exception of Columbia/Legacy, I don't solicit promos from major labels as, while, in theory, I'd agree that we can't just write them off, they're such marginal players in roots music that in practice it saves an awful lot of time not to bother plowing through their releases on the off chance that some of them might be any good. Which frees me up to plow through indie and self releases on the off chance that some of them might be any good, because when they are, they need any ink they can get.

And airplay. The schism in FAR was essentially between DJs who said things like "I play good music wherever it comes from" and those who see every spin for a major label artist as denying precious airtime to an indie. Again, I take the pragmatic point but it troubles me that an album with more copies allocated to promotion and more money to publicity than the entire pressing and total budget of most indie and all self-released albums, gets played on any of the very few shows that usually devote most, if not all, of their needle time to the latter.

Am I happier when, say, Martí Brom or Sam Baker, rather than Bruce Springsteen, who'll never know and wouldn't care, wins FAR's #1 slot? Frankly, yes, because that kind of peer recognition means so much more to them, and any sales it might generate mean more to Goofin' and Reckless than to Sony, but it's not my call. I just tally the points. If I thought for one moment that FAR was becoming just another cog in the marketing machine, I'd fold it in a heartbeat, but one win in 82 go-rounds? I can live with that. **JC**

THE GINN SISTERS • BLOOD ORANGES

(Sweetbird *****)

First, I have to apologize to Tiffani and Brittani Ginn. Reviewing (#89/178) their 2004 debut **Generally Happy**, I remarked that their names made them sound like cheerleaders, but I've since discovered that this was a base canard—they were actually majorettes. The older sister is sticking defiantly to Tiffani with an i, but it turns out that the younger has always gone by 'Brit' and only used the full version of her name on the album because she thought that was more professional.

When I spoke to the sisters, they'd just done a radio spot in Idaho Springs, Colorado (or possibly Colorado Springs, Idaho, it wasn't a good connection). Either way, they were somewhere every enterprising Austin act needs to be, a long way from home, with a string of gigs and CD release parties, mostly in Nebraska and Kansas ("It's really odd, we have this great big audience in Kansas"), between them and their own beds. This is pretty good going for an act that only moved to Austin, from Schulenburg, TX, in 2002.

You may wonder why this is worthy of note, maybe thinking, surely four years is enough time to get a career rolling? The reality is that many, if not most, talented musicians don't have a clue about the business side and the Ginns would be the first to tell you it's not their forte. Put at its most basic, you can't write songs and work phones at the same time, and even if you could, both require their own expertise and flair to be done effectively. So most musicians need help, but professional bookers and managers only step in when a certain level of success has already been attained, which is fair enough, 10% of peanuts isn't worth the time and trouble.

One common solution is to divide the labor with a partner, obvious examples being Jerry Jeff & Susan Walker, Ray Wylie & Judy Hubbard, Slaid & Karen Cleaves, three very successful Mom & Pop cottage industries. This is, in fact, what the Ginns have done, though in their case there are a couple of unusual twists. One is that Tiff's husband, Bill Passalacqua, is, well, her husband, taking care of bidness for his wife when it's generally the other way round. The other is that he's an accomplished musician in his own right, but is subordinating his career to further his wife and sister-in-law's. Offhand, the only parallel that comes to mind is Morris Ledet who, recognizing his wife's potential, folded his own band to become Rosie's bandleader and bassplayer. Coincidentally, Passalacqua is also The Ginns' bassplayer.

Not that we've seen the last of Passalacqua as Artiste, but for now he's happy to be the backroom/back of the stage guy. "Bill has such great ideas, he sees the big picture and sets attainable goals, so we can focus on the short term. He lets us concentrate on the creative side." "Mainly I'm booking them into places I've played myself, where I already have some credibility. I booked myself for years and developed an instinct for it. It may help that I'm also a booker, for Cafe Caffeine. I pick up tips from the way people approach me for gigs."

Of course, being a booker is a whole hell of a lot easier when you're working a sharp and sassy act that clubs actually want to book. Tiff, who sings lead and writes most all the songs, and Brit, who sings harmony (she also plays flute but not on the album), have been performing in public most of their young lives, ever since Tiff sang a solo in church when she was three ("Brit was two and she was telling people to shut up and listen"). As children, they played all over Texas with their mother, who sings low harmonies on two tracks, uncles Lonnie, Darry & Garrett and grandparents Bill & Betty Pettit as The Pettit Family Band or The Unplanned Parenthood Association. "We never made a conscious decision about music, it just became what we did and it's pretty much all we know how to do."

Without wanting to stereotype them, The Ginn Sisters of **Generally Happy** were essentially 'Entertainers,' and very proficient ones, but, whether it's just natural development or associating with Passalacqua and his circle, The Ginn Sisters of **Blood Oranges** are getting into 'Serious Singer-Songwriter' territory, their material, nine songs by Tiffani alone, plus three cowritten with Passalacqua ("Only because he walks into the room while I'm writing" ["That sounds like my girl"]) and another by Abi Tapia, far more substantial, while musically it's a quantum leap from their recorded live in three days debut. Produced by Bradley Kopp, it's—well, I'll let Passalacqua have the last word: "**Blood Oranges**. Pretty normal looking on the outside, but when you peel it back, whoa, it's dark (the lyrics), but then the music is sweet and delicious and meaty. Blood=sisters... The cover evokes squeezing the blood out of a heart. It's pretty graphic. So there you have it, dark but sweet. Life." **JC**

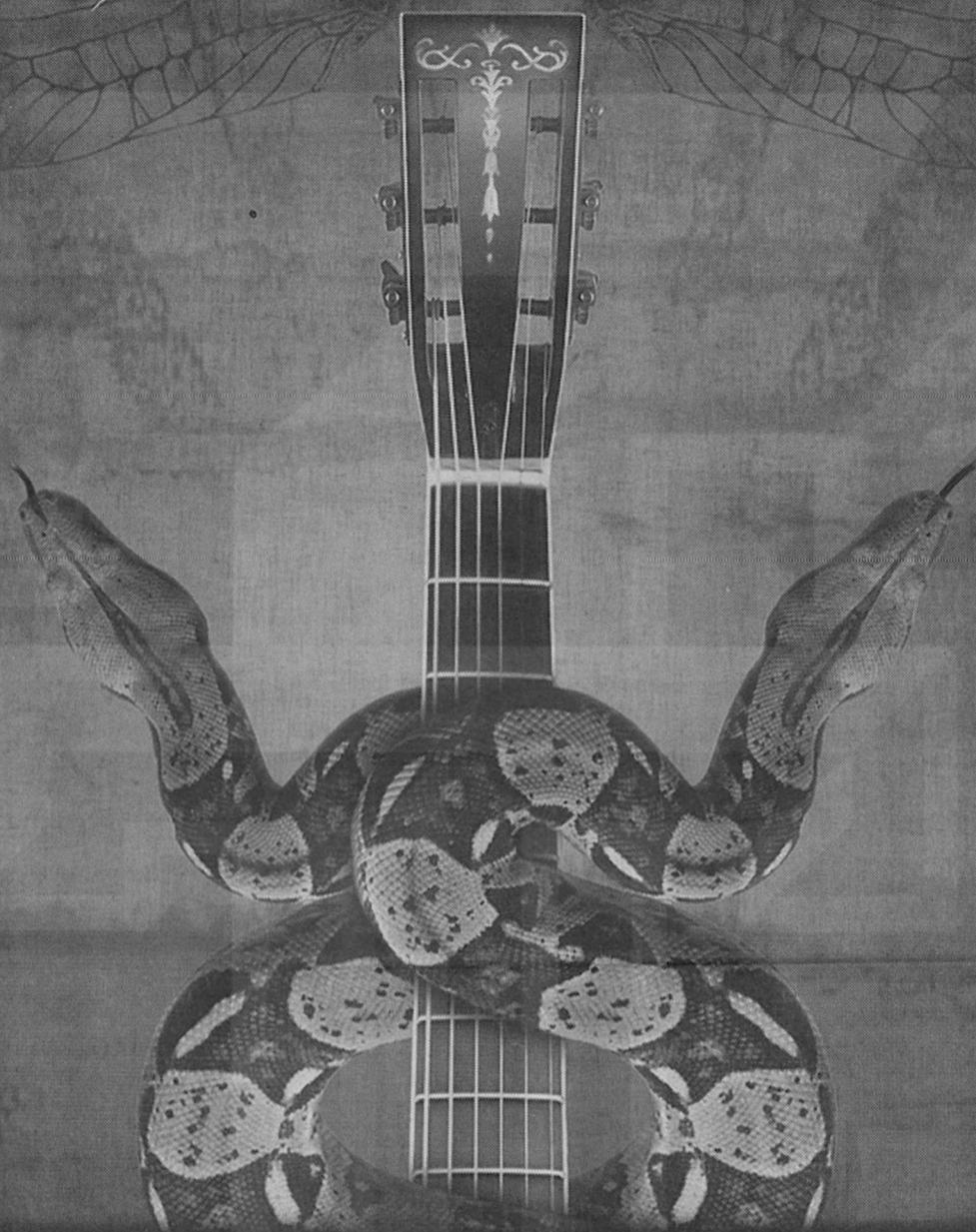
WIN A PERSONALIZED COPY!!

This is a reprise of a competition I ran last time I wrote about sisters (Morales and Wiggins, #30/119), with a few new, incredibly obscure additions. What we're looking for here are the names of the groups those sisters were in and the three most complete answers received by, oh let's say July 19th, will win personalized copies of **Blood Oranges**. Bonus Googling points will be given for alternative group names and for the two pairs of identical twins.

Barbara & Phyllis Allbut
Veronica & Estelle Bennett
Bette & Rosie Collins
Carol & Terry Fischer
Marge & Mary Ann Ganser
Carolyn & Mildred Gill
Millie & Dolly Good
Ellie & Laura Greenwich

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