

ISSUE 12

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★ M A G A Z I N E ★



The Amazing Crowns ★ Dale Watson ★ Robbie Fulks ★ Split Lip Rayfield

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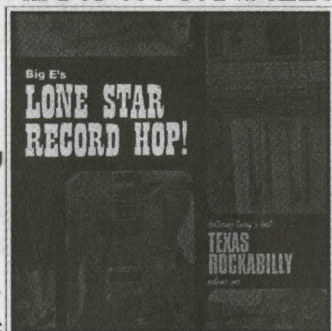
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**Grindstone staff**

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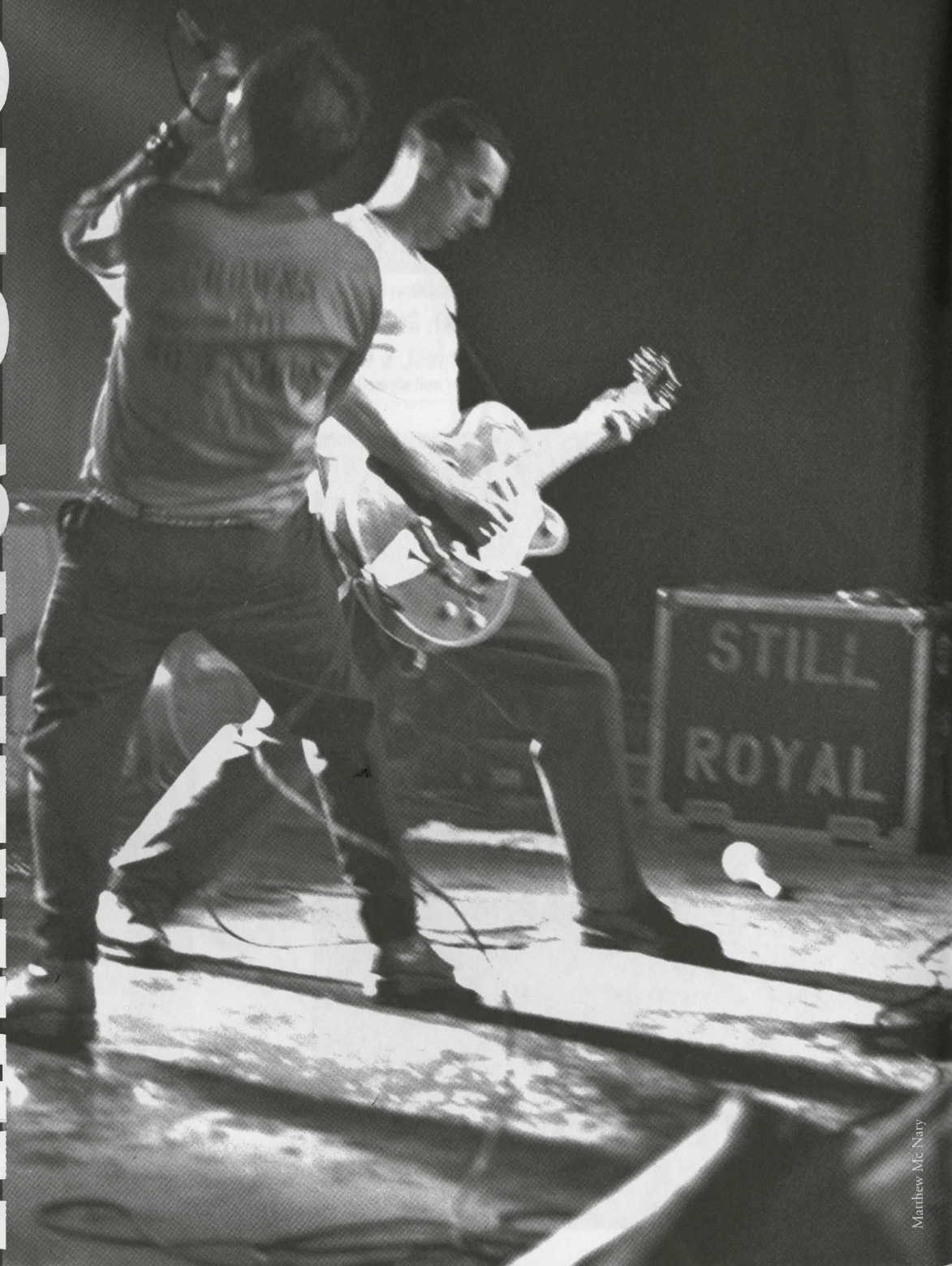
T H E

# AMAZING CROWNS

Interview by **Josh Lewis**

photography by **Matthew Mc Nary**

and **Mike Moriatis**



Matthew Mc Nary

# kings

# of the road

Number of  
miles logged  
touring:

About 600,000 miles in this country alone

#### Flat Tires:

• About 30 or so

#### Vans Owned:

• 3 (and countless rented vehicles)

#### Breakage:

• Mic Stands: at least 60 &

Microphones: ten

• Stand up basses: 3

• Ribs: 2, Wrists: 1, Toes: 1,  
Hearts: many!

• Labels: 2

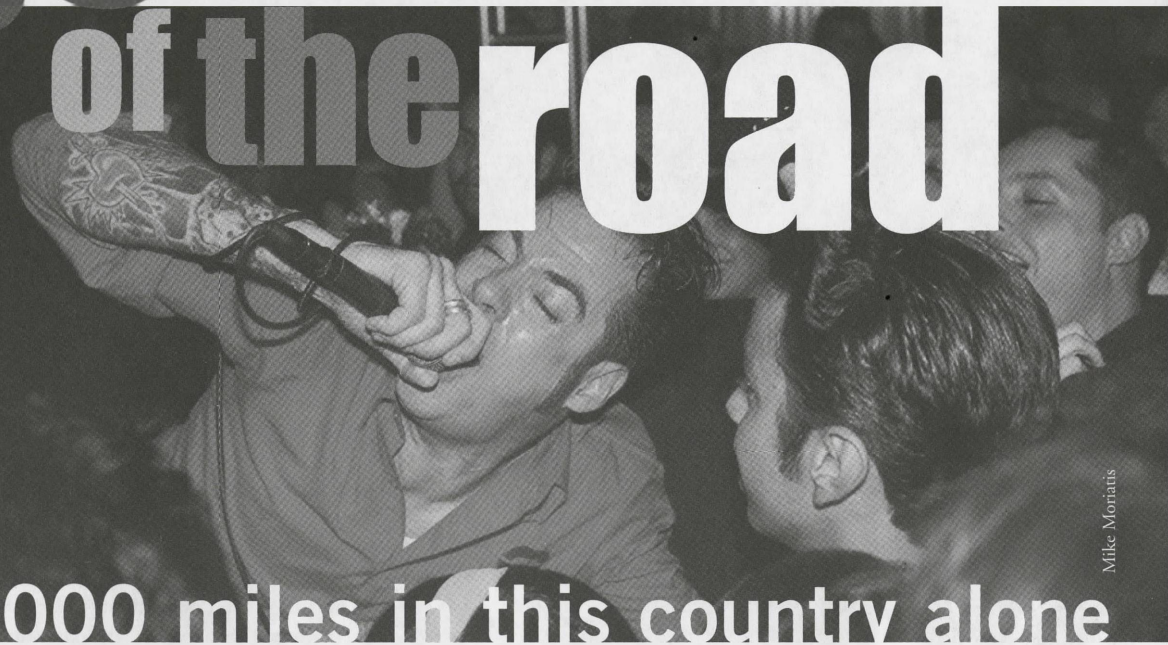
#### Releases:

• The Amazing Royal Crowns

• Payback Live

• Royal

• Several singles & compilations



Mike Morantz

Before Jason "King" Kendall went into the army, his father gave him some advice. "He told me, 'the first time someone fucks with you, hit him; don't think about it,'" the younger Kendall recalls. "Being in the army is like being in jail, either you're a victim or someone who fits in. I didn't want to be a victim. This one huge guy in basic took offense at me (a skinny little kid) for some reason. I remembered my father's advice and punched him as hard as I could in the side of the head. It didn't even faze him. He turned around and beat the living shit out of me. I had a concussion from his beating my head against the steel bedpost. No big deal, you recover. But I never got shit from anyone again."

Kendall's brawling days, which included fighting Nazi skinheads while stationed overseas, may be over, but his experience and philosophy serve him well as singer of the Amazing Crowns, a band that's faced more than its fair share of adversity. The Providence, Rhode Island-based band has already endured a lawsuit-imposed name change and the collapse of two record labels. Through it all, the band's attitude can be summed up by Kendall's words: "No big deal, you recover."

The Crowns have taken their licks from the music industry, but refuse to become its victims. "We're like a junkyard dog," says Kendall. "We've been through a lot of scrapes and tussles, but at the same time we're roaming that perimeter and we're never gonna leave. We'll jump the fence and chase you down."

Like a junkyard dog, the band, originally named The Royal Crowns, quickly staked out its own territory after forming in 1994. The band infused rockabilly with the energy of punk, creating catchy

songs with sing-along choruses. "You need lots of 'whoa whoas'," Kendall grins, "because when you go to a show you want everyone together; it's solidarity." Jack "The Swinger" Hanlon (upright bass) adds, "We have sort of a Ramones element to our songs; we play up tempo but we're mindful of them being tuneful."

The band made a name for itself, propelled by its souped-up brand of punk-injected rockabilly and incessant touring. After its first self-titled album came out on the band's own Kingdom label, it was soon picked up and re-released by Monolith, a Boston label. The album was later released again by Velvel Records, which basically folded before the Crowns, by then named The Amazing Crowns due to a lawsuit brought by Royal Crown Revue, could record a second album. (Kendall is quick to point out that the Crowns bear no ill will toward the other band over the suit.)

The Crowns' explosive live show quickly won new converts. "To me," Kendall says, "a show should be different every time. Not to say that it's going to be [he laughs], but it should be. If the crowd is good then they're going to get their energy back 10 times over." That might involve his swinging from the rafters, jumping into the crowd, jumping off amps, or conducting an impromptu interview with a bouncer in the middle of a set.

"At the risk of sounding full of it, I think that if you're going to be a good frontman for what we do, if you can't lose yourself in the music, then you might as well not be up there. Because I lose myself in the music ... I'll fall into the drum kit, I'll cut my head open. I'm definitely not as crazy as, say, Billy Hopeless from the Black Halos [a Vancouver-based punk band]; he's insane, almost

like the reincarnation of Stiv Bators. By the same token, though, I'm no slouch at hurting myself." A T-shirt that Kendall bloodied while rolling around on the broken glass-covered stage of the Masquerade in Georgia, hangs over the bar of that club as mute testament to this last statement.

The other members of the band (Hanlon and Greg "JD" Burgess on guitar) take a less frenetic, though no less entertaining, approach. Hanlon avoids typical bass aerobics like standing on top of the instrument. "I'll throw my bass up at the end of the set, and that's bad enough," he jokes, "but it is a good crowd pleaser." In general, the band lets its music speak for itself.

The Crowns expanded their sound when they quickly rebounded from the departure of its original guitarist, The Colonel, by adding Burgess, who formerly played with such bands as psychobilly-tinged The Speed Devils, and surf sensations The Fathoms, in addition to numerous blues bands. "Greg brought a lot of influences to the band," states Hanlon. "He can play any style of traditional blues and rockabilly all the way to punk or Led Zeppelin." Burgess showcases his chops on songs as diverse as the lightning quick rockabilly tune "Done You Wrong," and a show-stopping hard-rocking cover of AC/DC's "Sin City."

While the band's presence demands attention when the Crowns take the stage, the band inadvertently draws stares off-stage as well. Travel for any length of time with The Amazing Crowns on the road and the chances are you'll be asked if you're in a band. There's good reason: the foursome looks like a working-class band of greasers should. With greased hair, work jackets, pegged pants, and T-shirts, they don't look like a bunch of hepcat

Darren Hill

Ten Pin Management  
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# Kendall's road advice

Matthew McNary

## top 5 things to do at a truck stop

*Hey, he grew up on one, so he oughtta know!*

1. Go directly to the cheap tape bin and scour for any Hank Sr, Cash, Jones, ZZ Top or Redd Fox tapes (usually \$5.99).
2. Always try to use the facilities in the Truckers lounge (lots of fringe benefits like actual private toilets, great video games and private telephones). Paradise when traveling.
3. When in Tennessee DO look for "paperweights" (the brass kind if you know what I mean).
4. If it's winter try to chat up a fellow driver and find out conditions ahead and always get the 'Truckers Edition Atlas.' It has a number for each state you can call for road conditions and great mileage charts.
5. After attending to all your needs, wander aimlessly about to prolong getting back in that hellhole on 4 wheels... the van.

## things to not do at a truck stop

1. **DO NOT** grab the intercom system from the fuel desk attendant and announce the fact that you're looking for the LOT LIZARDS!
2. **DO NOT** obey any of the instructions on the bathroom wall; It's not gum & it doesn't taste good ... It's not a cowboy hat so don't wear it ... and whatever you do, DON'T wait for the dude that likes 'em young and in the third stall at midnight!!!
3. **DO NOT** brag loudly that your daddy shot a few of them no good "wildcatting independents" back in the truckers strike of the seventies!
4. **DO NOT** crack any mullet jokes while in the Truckers lounge.
5. **DO NOT** order the "18 wheeler special" with a side of chili, extra toast, corned beef hash & chocolate milk when you were up all night with the opening band & the bartender, and you've got a 10 hour drive ahead of you through snowy twisty mountain passes and cranky bandmates. It don't look as good the 2nd time around.

posers dressed to impress on a Saturday night, but rather like blue collar guys on their way to a day job. Workers and patrons in the truck stops and diners the band typically frequent seem to sense kindred spirits, even if they don't recognize the band's name. In fact, Kendall grew up at a truck stop his parents owned on the Connecticut/Rhode Island border.

"We had this show in Tampa," Kendall relates, "and we were walking down one side of the street after sound check to go to dinner. Walking down the other side of the street is Fugazi. We all give each other 'the look' because you know it's a band. I knew it was them because I love Fugazi. I don't think they know us, but that's cool."

Considering the potholes and detours that the seasoned road veterans have encountered, it's no surprise that the lack of recognition doesn't faze the Crowns. Some of Kendall's high points were playing with X at the Blood Drive, touring in Australia, and recently singing Naked Raygun's 'Rat Patrol' (a long-time Crowns' live staple) with Naked Raygun's Jeff Pezzati in the latter's hometown of Chicago. However, the band seems proudest of the results of a touring schedule that has led it across the country 14-15 times.

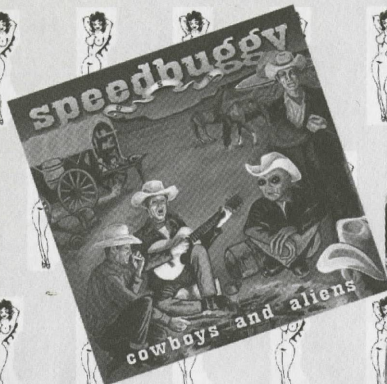
"We've been very lucky to build up this following across the country," says Kendall. "Florida has really been good for us; especially Orlando and Tampa. Dallas is great for us right now, as well as Austin, Kansas City, definitely Los Angeles. [LA is] probably the best place in the country for us right now. They've just embraced us with open arms. Between the Hootenanny, the Blood Drive, Bowl-a-rama, the Troubador, it's exploded for us there. I love the whole greaser presence."

The band will have to rely on its touring skills and fanbase once again, as its most recent label, Timebomb Recordings, recently collapsed. The Crowns released their second album "Royal" on Timebomb in the spring of 2000 (just after they released a live album "Payback Live" on Kingdom/Monolyth), but then, Kendall explains, "Arista pulled out and Timebomb kind of dropped everything. They didn't screw us over; they just kind of stopped." Most of Timebomb's roster, including the Crowns and the Reverend Horton Heat, had little alternative but leave the struggling label.

Characteristically, the band has taken the latest setback in stride. "We'll keep staying on the road," states Hanlon, noting that the band was heading to SxSW in March. The band also has plans to record a third studio album. "We're not going to get complex," says Hanlon, "we'll remember we're a live band and make sure the album is more live and edgy than slick." Kendall adds, "It will be the perfect marriage of the first two, combining the great raw feel of the first album and the better song structures of the second. I can't wait actually."

Kendall concludes, "We may not have a hit single, we may not be on [commercial] radio, but that's fine because we've worked so hard over the years at building up our fanbase. We have that and that always carries us through in the end, no matter what happens. Always."

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Sat. 7th New York, NY  
Mon. 9th Virginia Bch, VA  
Tues. 10th Chapel Hill, N.C.

Wed. 11th Atlanta, GA  
Fri. 13th Austin, TX  
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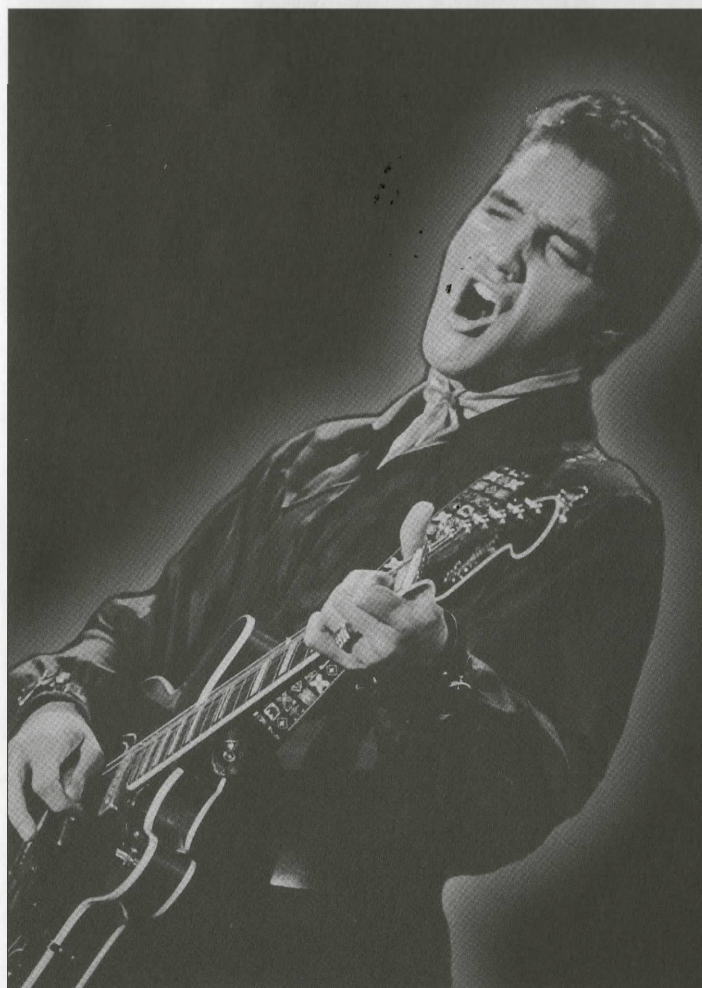
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Thur. 16th Albuquerque, NM  
Fri. 17th Tuscon, AZ  
Sat. 18th Phoenix, AZ  
Sun. 19th San Diego, CA

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# Fulks

a c o n v e r s a t i o n w i t h

# robbie

Interview by **Laura Kane**

photography by **Elaine Moore**



## "Country Is Not Pretty"

At first glance the board-thin, unsmiling stiffness of North Carolina native Robbie Fulks is reminiscent of an undertaker, or a younger version of the man with the pitchfork in the *American Gothic* painting. His serious demeanor belies a deeply sardonic sense of humor, which is reflected in songs with titles like the anti-retro "Roots Rock Weirdos," or "She Took a Lot of Pills (and Died)." Fulks also writes a column called *My Day* on his website. It's an intimate personal revelation of his life experiences, which is a bit like a car wreck; so compelling you can't stop looking at it.

There's an unsettling darkness to Fulks world-view that could perhaps, at least on the musical side, reflect his deep roots in the tragedies of early country, bluegrass and old-time dirges. Like his music, his prose (which ranges across subjects as diverse as life on the road to getting audited by the IRS) shines a harsh light on modern America, it's customs, and it's inhabitants.

But the fact is that both live and on record The Undertaker makes music so accomplished and so gorgeous one can't help but feel redeemed. Fulks possesses a powerful voice whose high-lonesome ring can lift you to the ceiling of heaven or drag you to the floor of hell. When he opens his mouth to sing, it's so beautiful it feels at times like old George Jones himself is up on stage. And when he rips into one of those lightning-fingered leads on his beloved Martin guitar it can take your breath away.

His first two albums, 'Country Love Songs' and 'South Mouth' introduced a melodious, full-bodied brand of pop, folk and classic-influenced country that is unafraid to either rock or shock. Songs like "Dirty Mouth Flo" and the anti-Nashville anthem "Fuck This Town" mark Fulks as part of the group of outlaw upstarts who, like BR5-49, Lucinda Williams, Steve Earle and Wayne Hancock, helped put the blood back into the corpse of contemporary country music. Don't ever expect to see Fulks at the Ryman, though. There's too much poetry in his songs, and too many off-color, even downright pornographic references to people who, among other things, love, lust, fuck, lie, and lose.

**GM:** What were some of the significant factors that contributed to your musical aesthetic?

**RF:** Growing up it was Doc Watson, John Hartford, New Grass Revival, Country Gentlemen, all the stuff my folks listened to. When I was a teenager it was Bob Dylan and the Beatles mostly. Then I went away to college and started listening to new wave stuff like Elvis Costello, Gram Parker, The Pretenders, and the Police.

Everybody in high school was still listening to Kiss and Led Zeppelin. It didn't interest me much, and still doesn't. So I was missing out on all this great stuff that was going on in the late '70s. But when I went to New York in the early '80s I caught up.

**GM:** What were you studying at Columbia?

**RF:** Nothing much. I was mostly hanging out in the bars in Greenwich Village. I wasn't a very good student.

**GM:** Did you go to Chicago directly after college?

**RF:** Yes, I followed a girl there. We had a kid, then we broke up. They kept living there so I kept living there.

**GM:** What was your relationship to Nashville?

**RF:** I got a job that permitted me to quit the straight job I had during the Trailer Trash years. I was working as a songwriter for a publishing company, where they advance you a weekly salary and try to get your

lar case it was the fact that the guy who signed me to my deal got another job immediately afterwards. The people responsible for pitching my songs either didn't like them, or didn't have any connection with me or didn't care to work them.

**GM:** Was there a reason for that? Was your writing style not mainstream enough for them?

**RF:** I tried to make the songs as dumb as possible. I wrote a lot of stuff that I would never record or do onstage. I felt like I was giving them enough to work with.

**GM:** Tell me more about "Fuck This Town." Was that your good-bye kiss-off to Nashville?

**RF:** I guess at the time I wrote it, I was blowing off steam and having fun. It was closure in a way. It was during a period of a couple of months where I was getting more and more disheartened by this deal. It sounds kind of petty, and it is kind of petty to write songs like, "With all my great material, why isn't anybody making me a star?" I was peeved like anybody would be to work that hard, to kick out four to six songs a month, which is a whole lot of work; it's like a 50-60 hour work week. Then I had to watch the songs fall on deaf ears without having anybody even really trying to work them. It was out of that frustration I just sat down and whipped that off.

you're not just saying fuck, you're doing it. It's way over the line for a country singer.

**RF:** Being country, the temptation is so overwhelming to kick over stuff, because it's turned into such a genteel, bogus music. It's the only form of popular music where gentility is still the order of the day. You sorta understand how people want to preserve the walls around their little polite scene down there. But it's just not my world, and it's really limiting artistically and personally to have to work with those strictures all the time.

**GM:** Who are the roots rock weirdos and why are they so heinous?

**RF:** Aren't you one? The Grindstone! The Grindstone readership!

**GM:** You mean the rockabilly-listenin' vintage-wearin' types?

**RF:** After doing a couple of records, especially after the Geffen record, I started to notice that there was this contingent of people — Dave (Alvin) has them too — in the audience. Some of them would dress up, but more than dress up, there was this proprietary idea about music and there are these rules. People might feel you can't use drums with music, or you can only use this kind of equipment or do this kind of style or whatever. It's a very narrow

Don't ever expect to see Fulks at the Ryman, though.

There's too much poetry in his songs, and too many off-color, even downright pornographic references to people who, among other things,

love, lust, fuck, lie, and lose.



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songs cut. I had that going for about four years. I got an education in cranking out songs and writing with other people and trying to tailor songs to a certain sensibility. It wasn't directly fruitful in any way, but it was educational.

**GM:** Were your songs getting cut?

**RF:** No. I haven't had any songs cut, except by like indie rock bands, since I started putting out records.

**GM:** So you were writing for this publishing company and you wrote "Fuck This Town" because you couldn't get a cut?

**RF:** I wrote that song in '96. At that point I'd been doing it for 2 years and had pretty well given up on anything happening. That's probably premature by the local standards. Conventional wisdom is that it's a five year town. You need to eat bologna sandwiches for five years before the big cut comes.

**GM:** What was your frustration based on?

**RF:** The usual music business things. In my particu-

Hopefully it doesn't only speak for me. Obviously there are a lot of great writers down there. Some of them are recognized and some of them are rich and some of them are totally obscure. I thought I'd found a satirical entry point because even though a lot of the people down there were so ill-served by the network, there's this kind of taboo that you can't say anything bad about Nashville. They say it's a great place to live, which it is; great standard of living, great weather, great people, music all day, music, music, music. To go down there in the middle of all that and say, "Fuck this! Fuck this stupid music, and fuck you guys!" is the height of rudeness. But it also says something a lot of people are thinking, but are afraid to say.

**GM:** It also has to do with the fact that a mainstream song had the word fuck in it. And then you did it again on your last album in an even more audacious and outrageous way. In "White Man's Bourbon"

ideological approach that I thought was kinda silly.

**GM:** But they come out to see you.

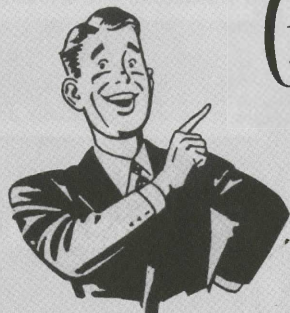
**RF:** I have a kinship with them, I wouldn't deny that. It's cool that there are people out there that still like the old kinds of music and aren't just off to buy the new 'N Sync record. I certainly have a lot more in common with those people than with the 'N Sync fans.

**GM:** Well, that'll save your ass. What's next?

**RF:** I've got a hillbilly record coming out on the internet. A limited release. Other than that I'm going to try to put out stuff myself from now on; get out of label land. I've got this record I've been working on. It's a continued attempt to try to ignore borders in music and to try to get together different kinds of instruments — whatever suits the song in any given moment. That should be out this summer.

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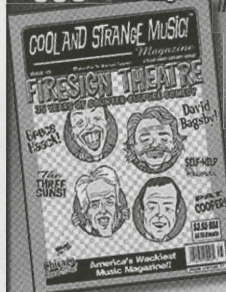


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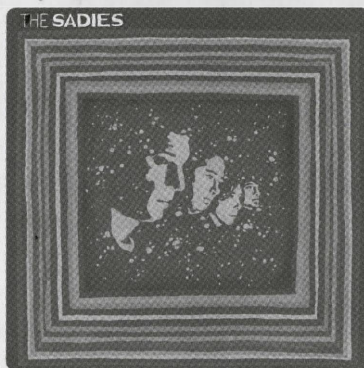
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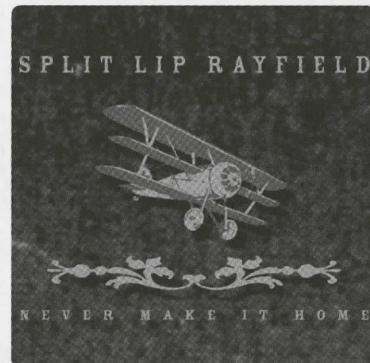
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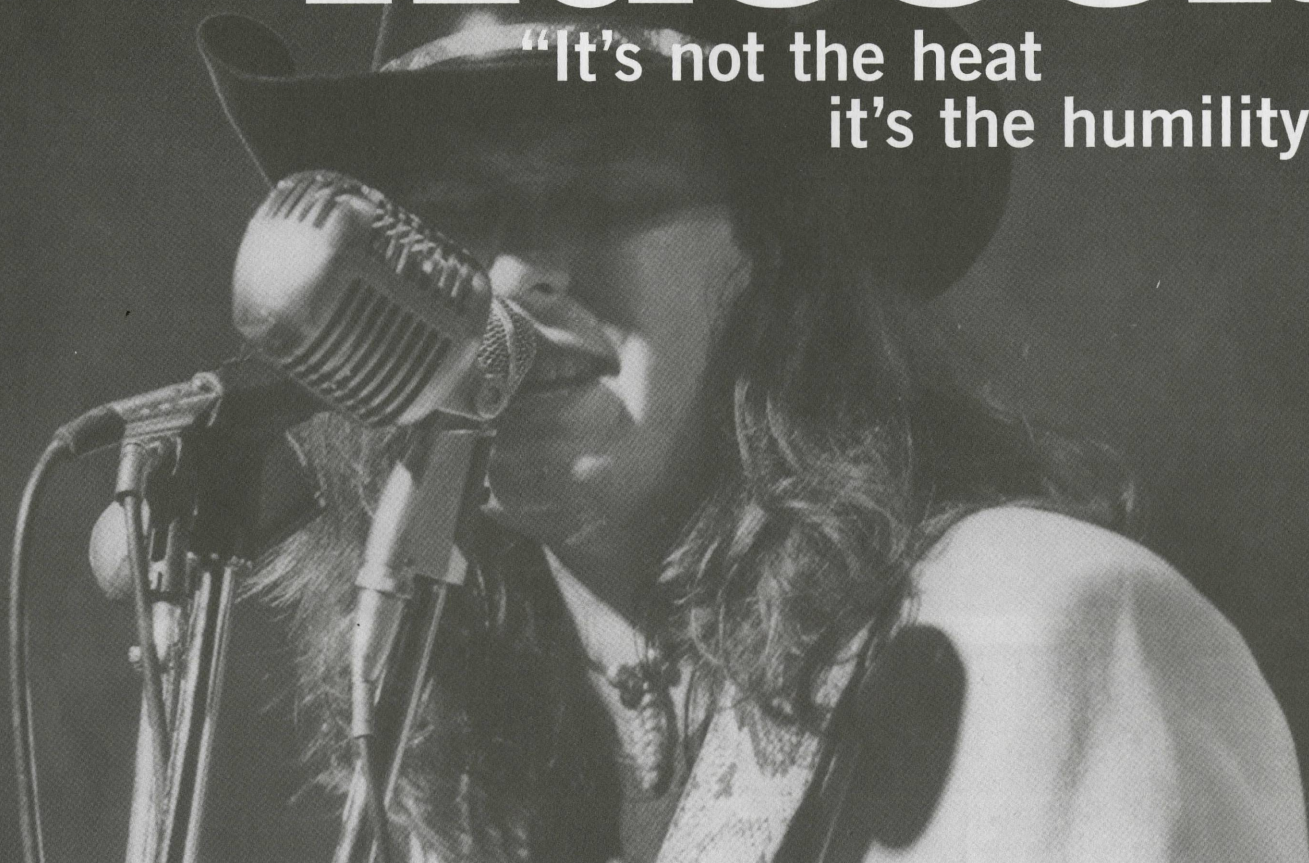
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Interview by **Tim Kazmerski**

photography by **Brian Ashley White**

# C.C. Adcock

"It's not the heat  
it's the humility,"



So quips C.C. Adcock about his beloved hometown of Lafayette, Louisiana. It's a balmy day in February — mild by Louisiana standards though nothing in Louisiana is ever exactly mild. The atmosphere is rich with the scent of blooming magnolia trees and bougainvillea vines tempered by perambulatory whiffs of the simultaneous growth and decay which is characteristic of this climate. The oxygen-saturated air is invigorating — it's strangely energetic and evocative of Louisiana's primal lushness and fertility. The Gulf Coast sky is overcast and boils into a darker gradient as each minute passes. It's gonna rain again.

to order the CD

Send \$15 check or money order to:  
C.C. Adcock  
509 Jefferson  
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"Lemme play something for you." C.C. points toward the best place in the room for listening to music, explaining that one of his speakers has recently died throwing off the auditory Feng-Shui of the place. He puts one of his recordings in the stereo, hits 'Play,' and the room rumbles. It's not immediately obvious whether the sound is the music or thunder from the pregnant storm. The rumble sustains for a moment longer. The afternoon sky is clearing and the rumble has built to a melodic bluesy riff. It's a distinctive sound. It's perfectly synesthetic with the smell of the air and hue of the light. It's clear that this music can only have been born right here, right in this exact spot.

Adcock himself was born here (though probably not in this exact spot) and he was born with those two hallmarks of great musicians; talent and heritage. C.C. speaks little about his talent but has much to say about his Lafayette heritage. This is the heart of Cajun Country. It's a region that holds a substantial chunk of the nation's mindshare mostly for its cuisine and, of course, music. While there have been occasional surges in the nationwide popularity of genres like Swamp-Pop in the fifties and sixties and Zydeco in the seventies and eighties, Lafayette has never fallen victim to the scourge of becoming a music industry scene.

C.C. explains, "There's a certain naiveté here about the business side of music. It's not ignorance. Business is just not thought of as a part of music. That attitude helps keep the industry out and the purity in." With that musical purity encoded right into his DNA, C.C. departed Lafayette as a teenager to play music in what is arguably the least authentic place on the face of God's green earth.

"I went to Los Angeles with my guitar like every other kid who wants to be bigger than his hometown," he chuckles. "Once I was out there, I knew the only reason I was eating and getting gigs was because I'm from Lafayette and I had that sound. I started going to a late night place in Hollywood that was a hangout for homesick Gulf Coast musicians. It was a studio owned by Johnny Perez of the Sir Douglas Quintet. One night I saw an English kid there singing a Tommy McLain song. He did a good job with it, too. He had soul."

The English Kid was named Tarka Cordell, a talented guitarist and budding producer. Tarka's father was the legendary Denny Cordell, developer of such acts as Joe Cocker, Bob Marley, and Tom Petty. So along with his talent, Tarka also had heritage, setting the stage for a natural friendship with C.C.

Adcock ended his sojourn in Los Angeles by seizing an opportunity to play and tour with Lafayette legend Buckwheat Zydeco. Favoring the business of making music over the music business, C.C. settled into a productive period, adeptly balancing his work with Buckwheat with his own creative projects. Soon, Tarka came to visit Louisiana and looked up Adcock. "We started doing some studio work and eventually showed the tapes to Denny Cordell who really got the project started." The "project" in question would become C.C. Adcock's first record, 'House Rocker,' which was put out by Island Records. Produced by Tarka with Denny doing A&R, the record promised to be a harbinger of the fat ol' kind of deal kids go to Hollywood to get.

"Denny didn't really focus on a lot of the technical studio stuff," Adcock recalls, "but he was very concerned about artistic development. He saw potential in me and he wanted to help me develop it." For Cordell, the secret to development lay in helping an artist find his own way, to identify a kernel, an essence, a soul — whatever you call it — and to allow that to come through in such a way where people will want to listen to it without compromising any of the root integrity.

"He told me, 'I don't ever want to hear you writing about political injustice because that's not who you are. You write about pussy'." Of course, Adcock notes, in Louisiana, politics and pussy go hand-in-hand but he took the advice anyway. Adcock theorizes, "The key element to pop is simplicity. You've got to strip it down to its essence and it was through Denny that I realized that the common element between pure pop and all my favorite roots records was that simplicity."

The Island record soon caught the ear of another legend of the recording industry. Jack Nitzsche (whose credits include The Rolling Stones, Neil Young, Phil Spector's 1960 Wall of Sound Sessions, and hundreds more jaw-dropping credits) heard 'House Rocker' at a party and put the word out that he wanted to work with Adcock.

Nitzsche had stopped making rock records at the end of the seventies but had scored dozens of major Hollywood movies including *Performance*, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and *The Exorcist*. He was also notorious for his eccentric spirituality and Louisiana had long been one of his favorite haunts (and may still be so, literally, because he died last year). "Jack was magic in the studio," recalls C.C., "He just knew innately what needed to be added and what needed to go. He could only make music from his heart."

The two had begun work on a follow-up record using 'House Rocker' as a basis upon which to build. "We continued working in that funky, fertile place making each song lush and natural, even overgrowing in places. The focus was on the music and what it needed to make you feel. Image, posturing — that was all such baby pabulum to Jack." Unfortunately, Nitzsche's untimely death prevented the record from being finished and released.

Despite the loss of his friend and mentor and the derailing of a project he had clearly poured his soul into, C.C. Adcock is at ease with his career and his prospects. "I feel blessed to have worked with such very special people. I feel like, because of them, I'll always be in the game. I've been given a foundation that most people haven't."

---

**"I went to Los Angeles with my guitar like every other kid who wants to be bigger than his hometown,"**

---

Though C.C. is still in the prime of his youth, his résumé already reads like that of an old legend. Having played with the likes of King Karl, Guitar Gable, Tommy McLain, and Bo Diddley, C.C. seems destined to become a legend in his own right. He's also scored two independent films, produced records for Steve Riley and the Mamou Playboys, and is developing a couple of local Louisiana rock bands.

As for his own musical career, he's careful and patient. "I'm not trying to hit a home run. It's a slow churn down here, a follow-through swing. I hear new bands talking about being on their fifth, sixth, seventh records like it's nothing. With new technology, anybody can make and distribute a record but I think there's going to be a backlash to that. With so much music out there, people are going to want more muse and less sick," he jokes.

Most importantly for C.C. is he's home, doing what he wants, at his own pace. "Understand that where we are geographically, the river brings all that good deep-end mud from everywhere in North America and shoots it right into our veins. Sometimes you can just reach out and pull a song right out of the air. It's really rich and that thick."

And he's in good company, too. He's assembled a nine-piece band of Louisiana all-stars including Steve Riley, avant-garde jazzier Dickie Landry, and legendary Excello drummer and crooner Warren Storm, calling themselves Lil' Band O' Gold, who play from time to time and always to great acclaim. He's also always got a little side project going with Swamp Blues guitarist Paul "Lil' Buck" Senegal. Adcock says, "This is one of the last places left in the world where you can knock on your hero's door and ask him if he wants to start a band with you." As for his own project, "I've been making so much music down here in the swamp. You know when you see those baseball players warming up with all those doughnuts on their bats? It's like that. I'm ready."

# REVIEWS

**Jim Lauderdale**  
The Other Sessions

Dual Tone Nashville  
2105 Elliston Place 2nd floor  
Nashville, TN 37203  
www.jimlauderdale.com

Grindstone country fans gather 'round! If you like real honky-tonk and sad country weepers, songs that are so good they transcend their genre, go buy Jim Lauderdale's new record on Dualtone, 'The Other Sessions'! In case you don't know who Jim is, (besides being a hit songwriter, and mentor to many writers in Austin, LA, Nashville, and New York), he's the most soulful country singer going right now, and 'The Other Sessions' prove it.

The first track has one of the best lines in a long time, "If I were you, then I'd love me forever" ...wow! Then the next two tracks, "Just To Get To You" and "I'd Follow You Anywhere" are co-written with none other than the legendary Melba Montgomery (remember those great duets she did with George Jones?), and both are pure heartache. "Merle World" is an obvious standout. This Bakersfield production has one of the purest vocals heard in recent memory. "You'll Know When It's Right," co-written with song-writing genius Harlan Howard, starts out with yet another killer opening line: "I'm sorry that you couldn't love me." That's country music, folks!

Then onto "Honky-Tonk Haze," sure to be a classic standard any day now, this one's got pain in it! If you're looking for a real trucker song, he's got that too... co-written with the king of all truckers, Del Reeves, "Diesel, Diesel, Diesel" will take ya right outta that four-door and into your Peterbilt rig! The record closes out with "It's Not Too Late" co-written with Texas songsmith Clay Blaker, and just leaves you pressing the rewind button!

In a genre full of contrived retro-acts, Lauderdale is coming from such an honest place that even if you don't like country music, you'll have to tip your hat to this record. Do yourself a big favor, go buy it... you won't be disappointed!

Jesse Dayton

## SHOT TO HELL

**Shot To Hell**  
This Band Right Here Is Called...

344 South 22nd Street  
La Crosse, WI 54601  
www.shottohell.com

A little bit Gun Club, a little bit early Violent Femmes and a little bit Rolling Stones... no that is still not quite it. The more I listen to this first effort from Wisconsin's trio, Shot To Hell, the more difficult it becomes to get a description to stick. Their style is not schizophrenic, actually it is very solid... just hard to accurately pin down. They have a good overall country rock flavor with a driving edge... but wait, then they toss in some rock ballad type stuff. Shit, I give up... all I know is that I really enjoy this CD. Yes, it is way more Rock than "Billy" so consider yourself warned. This band is damn good and actually one of the more intriguing new sounds we have gotten in quite some time... Give this CD a spin!

Pamela Esposito

**Twenty Blasters From Blighty**  
Various Artists

Raucous Records  
available through Hep Cat

This CD compilation epitomizes what British rockabilly is all about; Cra-Zee! In this re-issue from the eighties you finally get to hear Alain Whyte, Gary Day and Spencer Corbin in their rockabilly glory with smokin' classics "Born Bad" and "I'm Movin' On." Makes you think, if they hadn't joined up with Morrissey, the band Born Bad would have been up there with the best. Other rockin' bands highlighted are the Deltas, Wigsville Spliffs, the Nitros, Levi Dexter and Boz & The B-Men. A great introduction into the passionate world of Brit rockabilly by cats who really feel it!

Victor C.

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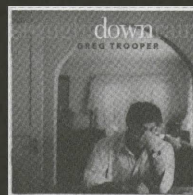
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# REVIEWS



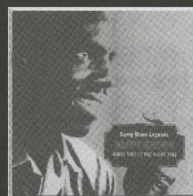
Greg Trooper  
Straight Down Rain

Eminent Records  
2410 Belmont Blvd.  
Nashville, TN 37212

Greg Trooper has delivered us another tasty little album. I enjoyed his last release, 'Popular Demons.' This one is just as good, if not just a little bit better. The songs are well written and the production is appealing. Trooper gets compared to Springsteen at times which isn't fair. Compared to Trooper, Broooce sucks. Trooper writes songs that stick in your guts.

'Straight Down Rain' is a little more adventurous than his last record. This is more of a finely crafted pop record, even alternative sounding at times. There's also a little country here and there. One tune, a hard-core country song that Julie Miller sings harmony on called "Real Like That," is the best damned thing on the record. In fact, it's the best damned song I've heard this year. This song moves me so much that I think that it should be released as a single, copies pressed and sent to every radio station in the world, then a pistol should be held to the program director's head until they listen to it. And that's just one song. There's eleven more on the record. While the songs shift stylistically from track to track, the album flows along very well. This is not just a tasty little album — it's a hell of a record. Trooper's gonna be bigger than sliced bread if he keeps this up.

Jeff Wall

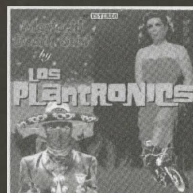


Nappy Brown  
Night Time Is The Right Time

Atlantic/Savoy Entertainment

This poor boy from the South belted out some of the best soulful jump blues in the fifties on the famous jazz label Savoy. Known for his moderate hit "Piddily Patter Patter" made famous again in John Water's film [italics] Cry Baby, this long overdue 2-CD compilation highlights some of his raucous rhythm & blues and soulful ballads. The birth of soul has a prelude to the often recognized Ray Charles... Nappy Brown is the man! Standout numbers to jive with your honey are "Skiddy Woe" and "I'm Gonna Get You." Do not overlook this real gone cat because he's up there with Wynonie Harris and Roy Brown.

Victor C.



Los Plantronics  
Mariachi Death Surf

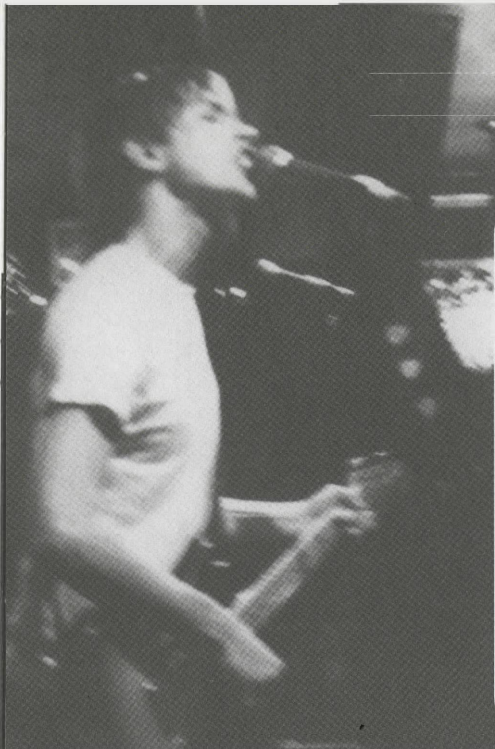
Mariachi Productions  
Norway  
www.los-plantronics.com

The premiere band in the genre "Spaghetti Surf-A-Billy." These mean guitar slingers are tough mothers. A great (mostly) instrumental record, with remakes of "For A Few Dollars More," "Birdogging" and "Have Love, Will Travel." A driving sound with brilliant production. Since this creates visions of surfing with your AK-47, a good cover might've been "Bikini Girls With Machine Guns." No where else will you hear the musical tale, "Satan Stole My Surfboard."

The opening track, "Stumblin' Guitars," will get your adrenaline pumping and your body pulsing. The American influence is felt in the song "Glam-a-Billy WipeOut." Some harmonica and organ are sprinkled around to give it some nice flavor, and keep it from being redundant. This disc might be tough to find, but well worth the hunt. In fact, it might make a good excuse to take a trip!

Cameron Davis

Interview by Jennifer Bird  
photography by Peyton Elias



# OLD 97's

**In 1956, Johnny Cash took a traditional folk railroad tune and made it his own. Others before him had done it with enormous popularity, like Vernon Dalhart, whose version sold millions in 1925. But the Man in Black added a menacing guitar and the voice that made that era in country music belong to him.** Some five decades later, a band of lads from Dallas raised on fifties Cash, sixties Beatles and seventies punk took their name as a nod to that spirit of American reinvention. Rhett Miller (vocals, guitar), Murry Hammond (bass, vocals), Ken Bethea (lead guitar) and Philip Peeples (drums) started making music together in 1994. Call it what you will: insurgent country, alt. country, No Depression, ~~ay~~ alternative, cowpunk, twang-core — Old 97's quickly moved to the head of the class. And with the release of their fifth CD, 'Satellite Rides,' some would say they've graduated.



**T**heir first independent releases, 'Hitchhike to Rhyme' (1994, Big Iron) and 'Wreck Your Life' (1995, Bloodshot) made them darlings of the insurgent zeitgeist. By 1997, they had a major label (Elektra) and a major release ('Too Far to Care') on their hands — and the whisperings of "sell-out" began. Never mind that 'Too Far' twanged AND rocked like hell, with cuts like "Timebomb" and "Four Leaf Clover" with Exene Cervenková on guest vocals. 1999 brought 'Fight Songs,' and the whisperings became shrieks.

The album was the undisputed turning point of the band's musical career. Trouble is, there is considerable dispute as to whether that turning point was positive or negative, a triumphant rise from "the No Depression ghetto" [*Spin* magazine] into greener sonic pastures, or a shameless plea for mainstream pop radio airplay. Browse any of the numerous message boards related to the band, peruse the reviews, and you'll find folks positively hollering at each other over whether 'Fight Songs' rules or sucks.

As bassist Murry Hammond jokingly concedes, "'Sell-out' would be an okay evaluation if the thing had actually [sold]!" I spoke with Hammond during some downtime in Los Angeles — the calm before the 'Satellite Rides' promotional storm. He gave me a Reader's Digest version of the band's adventures thus far, including the aftermath of 'Fight Songs.' It remains a topic of conversation, especially on the eve of the new release, which promises to bring Old 97's into even broader musical territory. He explains the difference between the two records as being mainly with the mood of the recording experiences. "We really kinda struggled to have unity on 'Fight Songs'," he says.

It was a time of deaths and illnesses in Hammond's own family, Miller's move to California, and Bethea's wedding planning. The resulting tone is palpable in its lyrical content, which juxtaposes



"He turned and said to his black  
greasy fireman,  
just shovel on a little more coal  
and when we cross the  
White Oak Mountains you can  
watch old 97 roll!"  
—The Wreck of the Old 97

despair and suicidal ideation with sometimes impossibly buoyant and celebratory melodies; an Old 97's trademark by now.

It was that catchy-as-hell buoyancy that exposed the singles "Murder (or a Heart Attack)" and "Nineteen" to the widest audience the band had yet reached. But the record that spawned the aforementioned controversial ditties also brought us "Jagged," "Valentine" and "Alone So Far," and no one's calling those mainstream fluff.

Hammond philosophically sums up the flak about 'Fight Songs' like this: "You can't freeze a scene or put it in wax paper, and as it grows, you experience growing pains. And you could try to change into something that kept the heart and quality that you first brought to your music, or you could put out 'Wreck Your Life II' or 'Hitchhike to Rhyme, Jr.!' " Longevity is the ultimate group goal, and Hammond explains that they needed to transition "between what we were and what we could be ... a career band, where we could put out 12 records and have all of them at least worth owning!"

Grindstone's website homepage says, "If it's getting played on the radio, you probably won't read about it in the Grindstone." Well, amateur pollsters, survey your friends and defy them to name how many times they have heard Old 97's on the airwaves, if indeed they've even heard OF them. I don't mean your hipster friends; go ask your cubicle-mate or your local grocery store bagboy. There are no Rhett Miller action figures in your Happy Meal tm. Even the vilified "Nineteen" was never in heavy rotation (or even light rotation) on MTV or VH1. After the dust settled, the big "sell-out" was much ado about not much.

And as if such controversies didn't keep these boys busy enough, side projects are abundant. Miller often flies solo (he has an enduringly popular if obscure 1989 release entitled 'Mythologies'), sometimes opening for acts like Chris Isaak. Hammond has a bluegrass CD in the works with up-

and-coming Los Angeles singer/songwriter Grey Delisle titled 'The Graceful Ghost'. Known as the "rootsier" of the two 97's songwriters, Hammond says he'd been wanting to embark on such a project for years, but hadn't encountered the perfect collaborator until he heard Delisle's CD 'The Small Time' and realized he'd found a kindred musical spirit.

"It looks like we're going for a real old-timey, bluegrass feel," he says, "like the old music, thirties stuff, the mountain stuff." Hammond is obviously excited about the project as he tells me about Steve Hartz' Old String Shop in Nacogdoches, where the recording took place. "They get all the big bluegrass people that are big down there" he says, "and we'll be using all of the local guys to flesh it out... it's going to be very cool."

Probably the most high profile and highly anticipated side offering is that of the Ranchero Brothers: Rhett and Murry and two acoustic guitars, makin' with the lo-fi sounds ala the Everly Brothers 'Songs Our Daddy Taught Us.' The Rancheros are favorites of the y'alternative cognoscenti who stand just this side of Ian McKaye on indie principles; it's like all the countrified goodness of Old 97's, with none of the corporate aftertaste! Miller and Hammond have built a strong following solely on the basis of their live shows, which are often celebrity-studded events (Winona Ryder is a fan, and Entertainment Weekly recently ran a snippet about her penchant for all things alt. country, especially singers like Miller and Whiskeytown's Ryan Adams).

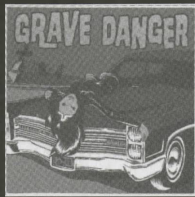
Hammond says that the Ranchero Bros. CD is almost complete and will most likely serve as "a little bridge record between this Old 97's record and the next one." Side projects like these are eagerly awaited, which is something to which Hammond has yet to adjust. "It's kinda funny being in a band that has some kind of modicum of fame or success 'cause I forget that when we're doing just some

little vanity project, there's a whole bunch of people out there who take it pretty serious! They're like, 'When is the release date on this?' And I'm just like, 'Oh, I don't know, I've just been kinda real busy this week, Tuesday was grocery day'"

One thing is clear, that 'Satellite Rides' will keep the ancillary projects on the back-burner for now. It is being called the best Old 97's record yet, by fans, the press, and also by the band itself. The strange aftermath of 'Fight Songs' saw the band regroup in a way that Hammond says they hadn't experienced in years. The unity that proved so elusive before had returned in spades, and the result is nothing short of brilliant. Songs like "Rollerskate Skinny," "King of all the World" and "Bird In a Cage" are top-drawer booty-shakers, the kind of stuff that just makes you glad to be alive. And with the buzz around "Up the Devil's Pay," Hammond is getting his biggest kudos yet as a songwriter.

A satellite ride is something you might find at a state fair, like a pony tethered to a pole riding kids around in a circle and ending up back where it started. And at this point there's no telling where Old 97's will be deposited after all is said and done; on the proverbial cover of Rolling Stone, or right back where they were, somewhere between fame and obscurity. Bottom line: Old 97's take an honest, astute reverence for classic country music and marry it with a punk sensibility and unfailing pop instincts. They craft songs that are smart both lyrically and musically, and their live shows will leave you breathless and sweaty like good sex. Even when they sing about utter dejection, like the Smiths at their best, no one can make you happier to be miserable than the firm of Miller Hammond Bethea & Peeples. You can put your money down on the fact that Old 97's are going to be one of those career bands that Murry Hammond talks about, and every one of their records will be well worth owning. At the end of the day, Old 97's is simply one of the best American bands around.

# REVIEWS



## Grave Danger self-titled

Rustic Records  
P.O. Box 15225  
Phoenix, AZ 85060  
www.rusticrecords.com

Grave Danger robustly blast an impeccable attention-grabbin' array of Link Wray-inspired surf, rockabilly, garage, and noggin-thumpin' jukejoint sonic swagger that feverishly flame broiled my ears somethin' fierce. While fervently listenin' to this pleasurable platter of musical misbehavior, I jubilantly leapt from the couch, wildly careened across the floor, and fitfully shook my backside silly like a straightjacketed slobber-lipped spazz. Then I reverently fell to my knees and profusely thanked Beelzebubba of yonder Hades region for spawning such a transcendent trio of aurally rambunctious rebel-rousers. Hellfire for sure indeed, these are some of the most ballsy, bad-ass, and infectiously brawny tunes ever laid to plastic. I addictively crave more, more, more!

Roger Moser, Jr.



## Rod Piazza & The Mighty Flyers Beyond The Source

Tone-Cool Records  
P.O. Box 81034  
Wellesley Hills, MA 02481

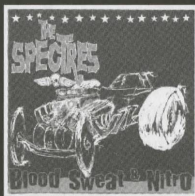
Mid July sees yet another release from this Southern California-based blues band. Having won the W. C. Handy award as the Best Blues Band of 1999 and 2000, they are obviously no hacks. Rod is the singer/harmonica player, and can be seen quite often in harp show-downs. A highlight of the band is guitarist Rick Holmstrom (more on him in a minute).

'Beyond The Source' sounds contemporary yet still has some soul, and in certain songs you can really feel it. I wouldn't rush out to buy this one, but if you are looking to buy something, this shouldn't disappoint. There's a reason these cats have been knocking around for so many years, after all.

Now back to Rick Holmstrom... I've been meaning to bring him up for a long time. He put out a record titled 'Lookout' in 1996, and it's a KILLER! It's one of those rare instrumental records that captivates you from first sip until last call. It's a true work of art, with lots of creativity and inspiration.

A little easier to find than 'Lookout' (but not quite as impressive) is his 2000 release titled 'Gonna Get Wild,' also on Tone-Cool. Rick steps up to the mic on a few of the songs, and the disc has many guests including Johnny Dyer, Andy Kaulkin and John "Juke" Logan. Rick really knows his instrument and how to get a real cool sound out of his rig.

Cameron Davis



## The Spectres Blood Sweat & Nitro

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Haan, Germany  
www.thespectres.com

Goodness gracious gosh-damn almighty, The Spectres crazily cut loose with a blarin' balls-out bombardment of psychotically twisted rockabilly rabidity that's all-at-once loud, lewd, and lively as hell! It's gritty, grease-slicked devil's music; barbaric bare-bones rock 'n' roll at it's most intense, exciting, and exuberant! While delightedly listenin' to the sonic sociopathic swagger of The Spectres, I closed my brew-slathered eyes and compulsively conjured ornately evil images of booze, broads, hotrods, sinful decadence, juvenile delinquency, switchblade-slashed street scuffles, blazin' Western-sky sunsets, whiskey-soaked boxcar excursions along the lone open railways of rural America, seedy 'n' sordid pulp fiction detective dramas, and black-and-white B-movie mass hysteria runnin' rampant and wild with UFO-invaadin' madness 'n' mayhem. These are the solidly stellar sounds of a spastic Scotty Moore-era Elvis, Eddie Cochran, The Reverend Horton Heat, Evan Johns And The H-Bombs, a more polished Demented Are Go!, The Krewmen, and The Reach Around Rodeo Clowns. The Spectres are beyond inspiring... they're more essential than sin itself!

Roger Moser, Jr.



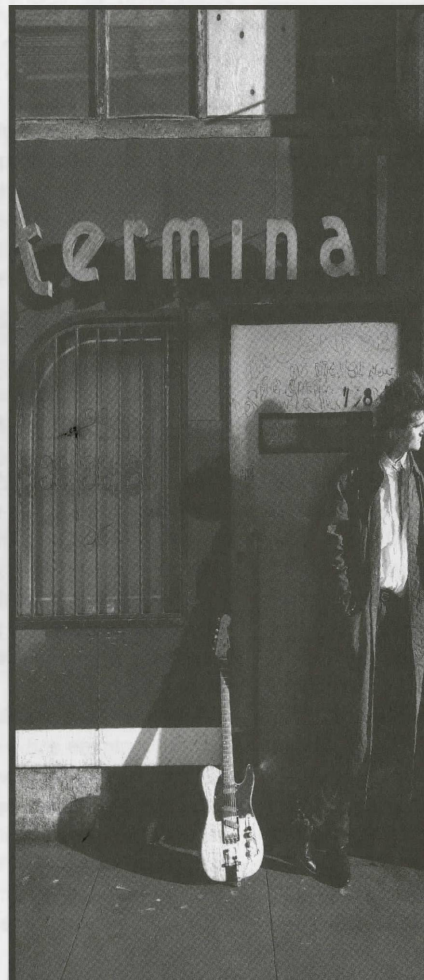
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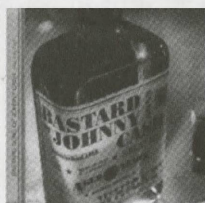
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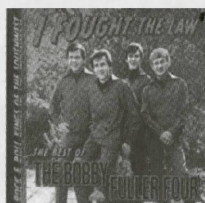
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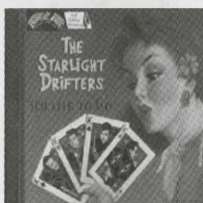
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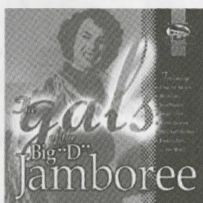
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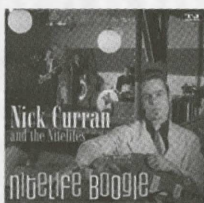
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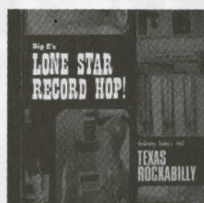
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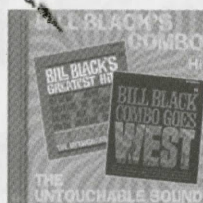
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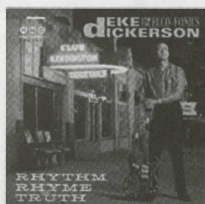
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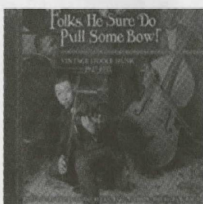
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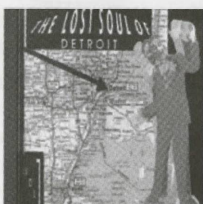
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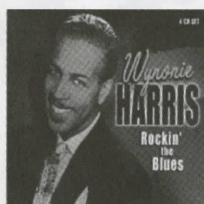
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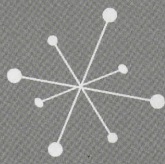
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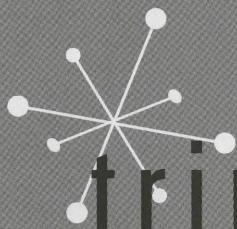
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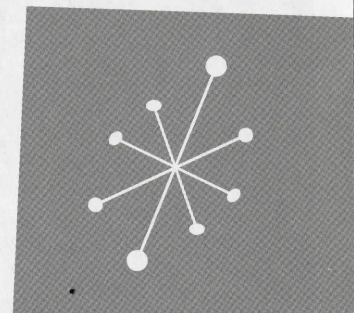
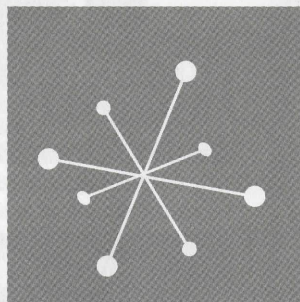
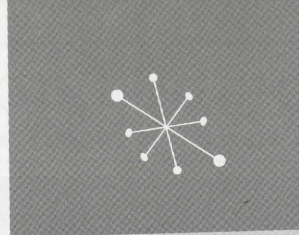
SOME



It has been said that “the beat” is what makes music move people. Who is responsible for “the beat”? That’s right kids, the drummer. Sadly most musicians nowadays want to play guitar or bass. No one is interested in being a drummer, so a well-rounded talented drummer is hard to find. There is only a handful of great drummers today, but there is one who outshines them all. Bobby Trimble from Big Sandy and His Fly-Rite boys is possibly the best drummer of our time.

He shadows the likes of Gene Krupa, Buddy Rich, Earl Palmer and countless other great drummers. Traditional old sound drumming is a dying art and Bobby is trying to carry the legacy. Being a drummer myself, I look up to Bobby and I strive to someday be as good as him. I caught up with Bobby in Hoboken, NJ right in the middle of their 2 month long tour. They are out promoting their new album, ‘Night Tide’ which was released on Hightone Records. Bobby took time out of his busy touring schedule to speak with me about a few drum-related subjects.





**GM:** When did you start playing the drums?

**BT:** In 1987. I had always been interested in music and always knew I wanted to be in a band. Prior to the drums I played guitar, clarinet and fiddle. The guitar didn't come naturally to me. I traded my guitar for a drum kit and started playing them in my room. I learned to play by listening to old Gene Vincent, Buddy Holly and Bill Haley records. I didn't even have any cymbals, so I would ride on my cowbell as if it were a cymbal. I was never into rock drumming or anything like that, I always knew I wanted to play with an old style.

**GM:** What influenced you to play in the old style?

**BT:** I was a rockabilly kid and I wanted to do something different by having an authentic rockabilly sound. There were a few drummers around the southern California area that had vintage kits and played with old style. Quinn Millard, a friend of mine, was a big inspiration. He showed me the proper way to play a shuffle, which a lot of rockabilly drummers play incorrectly. He used to have a Ringo Star Ludwig kit and some really good old cymbals. He wouldn't muffle all his drums like most of the other drummers, his drums sounded 'alive'. Everything had a real ringy sound that I liked and I knew that's how I wanted my drums to sound. Bill Bateman, from the Blasters, was a good guy to go see. He used Ludwig drums with calfskin heads on them. Also, Scott Campbell from the Paladins in the mid eighties was a good drummer with cool vintage drums. I didn't want to do exactly what they did, but they showed me that I didn't have to have the same sound as every other rock drummer.

**GM:** What kind of drums are you using?

**BT:** I play an early 1950's 4-piece Slingerland RadioKing kit with old Zildjian cymbals. I prefer the old drums because they have the old sound. I can't get a good sound out of modern drum kits. If you play new drums, they will sound like new drums. Cymbals of today are also no good; they are too thick and loud. That is why I prefer the older thin cymbals of the '30s-'50s. When I first started playing, I would see all these other drummers around town playing a stand-up kit. They had tape all over their cymbals and tom-toms to muffle the sound. I didn't want that dead sound, I wanted drums that sounded

like the drums on my old records. I wanted an old kit with an opened sound and a poppy snare. I listen to the way the drums sound on my old records and try to tune them like they did. Like I said before, I wanted to do something different.

**GM:** How did you become a member of the Fly-Rite Boys?

**BT:** Me and Robert (Big Sandy) were friends before I had joined the band, so we would always hang out together. I would go to a lot of Big Sandy shows and I always thought that they were the best band in town. I knew that if the chance for me to play in his band came up, I would take the gig. They had a really good drummer at the time (who can be heard on Big Sandy's first album 'Fly Rite'), but he wasn't working out. So they started looking for another drummer. I was in a surf band at the time, and in 1989 Robert asked me to be their drummer. I wasn't that great so it was very cool of them to give me the chance. I already knew all the songs from seeing them play all the time so it came pretty easy for me to play with him.

We don't really think about what we are doing, we just mix together the kinds of music that we like. We don't really fall into a category, much like the Billy Jack Wills band. They would do Dixieland, blues, country, bebop, and mix them into their own thing. We keep it traditional but we still have our own sound.

**GM:** What is your approach to playing an old genre of music?

**BT:** I listen to old blues, jazz, swing, big band, rock 'n' roll, western swing and encompass all those styles to the art of drumming. I will soak all the old styles in and regurgitate it into my own thing. I don't think of music and rhythm as mathematical patterns. I think about the lyrics of the song and the emotion of the melody, as well as keeping good time and rhythm. I think a drummer should lift the band off the ground. Music is all about emotion and if you make the music emotional the people will react to the feelings they see you putting out.

I don't bother learning any song exactly how it was done on a record. More than likely the drummer played it different every take. If you try to copy something exactly how another drummer played, you are

not being honest with yourself. You won't ever sound exactly like that drummer because you are not that person. Sometimes I will play a solo and think, "Man this solo is going to sound exactly like Gene Krupa!" I may think I sound like Gene Krupa but the outcome will always end up sounding like me. Everyone has his or her own individual style, which is what is so great about music.

**GM:** Who are your greatest influences?

**BT:** There are so many! A lot of them influence me for different reasons. Of course Gene Krupa and Buddy Rich are great. Dickie Harrell, DJ Fontana, and Dick Richards, they sound the way I think a drummer should sound. I admire the brush technique of Big Sid Catlett, Jo Jones, Shadow Wilson, and Ed Thigpen. I apply those drummers' school of thought into what I do. There are a lot of drummers and styles I like: Bop, New Orleans, Chicago, big band, rockabilly, western swing. To me, all those styles are in the same family and I play whatever style a song calls for.

**GM:** What advice would you give a young drummer today playing old style drums?

**BT:** Listen to the music. Don't worry about all the tricks and the show off stuff. Worry about keeping good time. Be as perfect as you can, but also make it feel loose. Swing it! Keeping the music feeling good is more important than showing off. Those things will come in time, as you become more proficient.

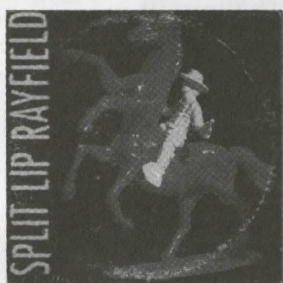
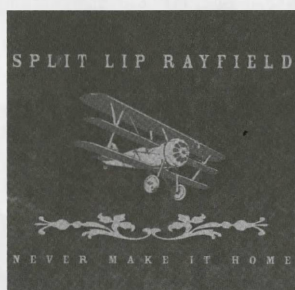
**GM:** What are your plans for the future?

**BT:** I want to take this band as far as it will go. Hopefully we will be around for a long time. But if the band can't go any further I have a lot of things I would like to do. I definitely would like to stay in the music business. Maybe open a drum shop, a record store, have my own radio show or maybe do a little producing. I already produced one album for a band called Billy and the Starliners. That was a lot of fun, and I would like to do something like that again. I think I would make a good session drummer in a studio. If they need an old style drummer for a movie soundtrack I could do that. I want to do a lot of different things.

**GM:** Any last words?

**BT:** I love you everybody!

# SPLIT LIP RAYFIELD



Story by Roger Moser, Jr.

★ Remember the cross-eyed, malnourished, banjo-pickin', inbred backwoods boy in the  
★ classic Americana-gone-awry movie *Deliverance*?!? Well, Split Lip Rayfield could very  
★ well be his long-lost hillbilly bastard brothers recently let loose from the Hootenanny  
★ Home for the Criminally Insane. Yeeeee-haw, grab your partner and dosey-doe —  
★ hang on to your hat, 'cause here we go! ~~~~~

**L**ike a catastrophic chaotically churning tornado turbulently twisting across the distant wind-swept horizon, Split Lip Rayfield rowdily roar outta the vast cornfield country of Kansas where endless open skies meanderingly merge with the seemingly unrelenting golden-hued landscape. But, oddly enough, this here herd of hedonistic hillbilly bluegrass trailblazers sounds uncannily like they were born, bred, and brewed in the pristine dew-covered rolling hills of rustic Kentucky. Indeed, SLP sonically conjure the wooden-structured solitude of technology-lacking rural America where dust-stirred dirt roads endlessly meander through a time-stands-still countryside strewn with a shambolic disarray of dilapidated run-down chickenshacks, scrapmetal scatterings of abandoned junkheap cars, and sad-eyed sun-fatigued cows lazily grazing in overgrown patches of rugged fertile earth surrounded by rusted barbed wire misery.

Feel free to sip a few suds as we pause for a brief, historically relevant announcement brought to you by the fine folks at Intoxicated Deviants, Inc.: according to Split Lip legend, Mr. Rayfield "was a 300 lb. shit-bum with a chronic chapped lip problem" who was a high school classmate of bass-thumper Jeff's parents.

SLP robustly appear to be brawlin' all-American good ol' boys, wide-eyed beer-guzzlin' rebelrousers, and wickedly unrepentant hellraisin' sinners who reflexively recover from the emotional upheaval of life's expectant heartbreak "one six-pack at a time" (to quirkily quote a bit of their lyrical ingenuity!). They expertly perform moonshine-drenched mountain music with fever-pitched precision, and their hootin'-and-hollerin' Hee Haw-styled hoedown ditties and traditional downhome rural roots-oriented songsmithing would put a sparkle in ol' Grandpa Jones's eyes and make him gloriously beam with conspicuous paternal pride.

But why bluegrass? Why the hell not!!! Mandolin-plucker extraordinaire Wayne unwaveringly waxes poetic, "After I discovered that I was allergic to electricity, it all fell together in our ultra country form." Indeed, these boys have such an unnatural knack for rotgut aural roguery, they must have surely been born with it venomously ingrained in their blood!

And now it is my supreme pleasure to affably introduce these hayseed hedonists to you all. The blazin' banjo pickings of Eric Mardis are as intricately pure and fiercely free-flowin' as cold clean Appalachian spring water ("Pickin' this banjo is like a shotgun in the mouth," says he).

Wayne Gottstine's maddaddy mandolin strummings are as tastily volatile as delicately aged sourmash whiskey, and he'll let you know right quicklike that he "can't write a song without a toothache."

The boomin' jugband bass strafings of Jeff Eaton are as ominously threatening as a mid-summer's thunderstorm looming large and foreboding in the violent lightning-streaked distance (no small wonder, because he proficiently plays a modified Ford gas tank contraption of earth-rumbling fury... "basically nothing more than a fancy washtub bass," as the band so humbly describes it).

Kirk Rundstrom's Mississippi mud-swirlin' guitar rhythms brazenly drip with soul-stirring fence-hoppin' huckleberry wild abandon that caused my head to spin somethin' fierce, boy howdy! And the drawlin' tobacco-chawin' backwoods vocals are rowdily well-crafted with a rotund hog-callin' complement of twangy huckster harmonies.

I'll be damned, these boys sound as if they were baptized by Satan himself in fire, brimstone, whiskey, and tobacco spit! Wheeeee, piggy!!!

*editor's note - All three of their releases are consistently great. At this year's SxSW festival in Austin, they had the rowdiest response of any band I've seen in the last 2 years. There are also 2 solo releases by Kirk Rundstrom, the first being very similar to Split Lip Rayfield, the second being quite a bit more experimental.*

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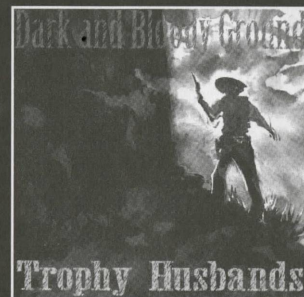
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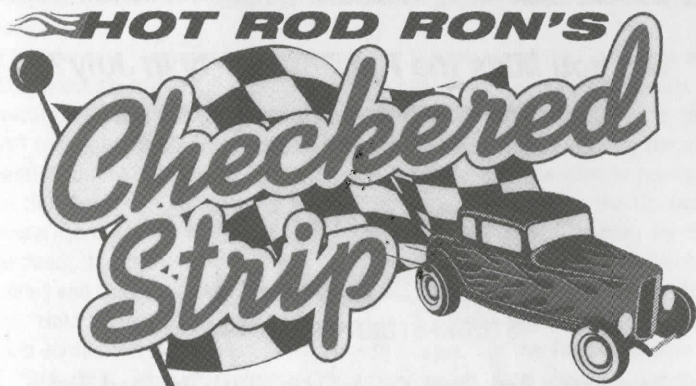


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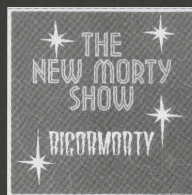
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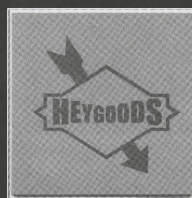
## The New Morty Show Rigormorty

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Ah, yes. The remnants of the Swing Movement shutdown. This is one of the more popular bands on the scene, though their schtick never really hit home with me. You see, one of the things they do is take punk songs as well as radio hits and play them with a big-band arrangement. If done correctly, it might not be all bad. But having seen them once, and listening to this disc, I get the feeling I'm watching a wedding band doing covers.

They tackle the X song "Hungry Wolf" and the oh-so-wonderful Poison song "Unskinny Bop." The band also ventures to remake a Cole Porter tune, "Just One Of Those Things," and with several original tunes, it's not all gimmick. But it just doesn't jive for me. I know some people who really think this band is fun, so we'll see if there's enough of an audience now that the fad is well over.

*Cameron Davis*



## Heygoods The Lights Of Town

[www.heygoods.com](http://www.heygoods.com)

As much as bands hate to be compared to any other bands, I was instantly reminded of The Knitters when I played this nice little package. (For those of you who don't know The Knitters, it's basically X and Dave Alvin doing back-porch country music.) When this disc kicks off, the similarity of singer Katie Champagne's voice to Exene's is uncanny (for good or bad, as I know people who will get in fights over whether Exene can sing or not). With David Champagne chiming in, the comparison to The Knitters and X is solidified. The remake of the Elvis song "A Mess Of Blues" (Doc Pomus/Mort Shuman) sounds a bit like The Knitters "Love Shack."

My favorite track is "Whatcha Gonna Do, Leroy," as you might have heard before recorded by Lefty Frizzell. Along with the covers of these songs and the Ricky Nelson "It's Late," you'll find some real nice originals. Most of the disc is fairly relaxing, but a couple really move. Self-released, I can't tell you how else to get it except their website. There's a good chance that if you're a fan of The Knitters you'll dig this one.

*Cameron Davis*



## Los Straightjackets Damas y Caballeros

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Recorded live at The Foothill Club in its final days (on the bill with Big Sandy), Los Straightjackets release a pulsating banquet of instrumental tracks made famous through their own repertoire. Standouts even to true rockers is their version of "Sing Sing Sing," "Pacifica," and "Casbah." What you thought might have sounded like pots and pans falling down stairs, Los Straightjackets with a straight face do their version of "My Heart Will Go On (Love Theme From Titanic)." You find yourself really diggin' the track as if you never heard it in the movie. The reason? Instrumentalist extraordinaire Eddie Angel is twangin' the strings. Don't take it from me, you're bound to find lots of good rockin' tunes or tiki melodies in this live album. Possibly the best instrumental act today. If you don't know them already, think The Ventures and Link Wray.

*Victor C*

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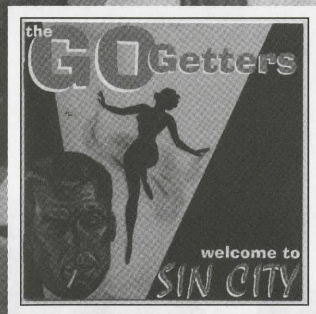
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We're southbound on a lonesome stretch of Australian highway somewhere between Mildura and Adelaide when I wake up.

# GO Getters

O N T H E R O A D W I T H T H E

It's three in the morning and I'm in the back seat of a sedan doing about eighty, a can of Victoria Bitter parked mysteriously in my right hand. I remember that I'm on tour with The Go Getters, who just hours earlier have rocked a full house of five hundred fans. Suddenly, the headlights from a northbound lorry shine dead-on through our windshield, fusing my optic nerves like a spot welder. In a moment of clarity, I realize we're on the wrong side of the road with seconds to live. As my sphincter and I prepare for our final tango, Peter Sandberg turns around from the front seat, and with a wide grin mumbles something about black slacks.

Flash forward two years to the present, and the release of the Go Getters latest CD, "Welcome to Sin City," where you too can relive the lighter moments of a typical Go Getters tour by spinning your slicks to such instant classics as "Road Kill" (recorded at the legendary Preston Studios in Melbourne during the aforementioned junket Down Under), or "I'm A Road Zombie," written in homage to the San Francisco custom car club of the same name, where the Go Getters remain honorary members. All the tracks on this CD were written by Peter Sandberg, the trio's lead singer and drummer, (he plays standing up, front and center) and they rock-- from the straight no chaser rockabilly of "Bourbon Train" and "Hold On Tight," to the steel guitar driven country of "Desert Rose," to the Louis Jordan-inspired blues of "Red House Boogie," to the Tarrantino-style surf of "Sin City" and "Pinstriper". Ronnie Dawson, who covered Sandberg's "MeXiGo" on his '96 release, 'Just Rockin' & Rollin' agrees. "I've known the Go Getters for about twelve years and have done some memorable shows with them, and in my opinion this is the best product they've ever produced."

The hot rod world has traditionally enjoyed a symbiotic relationship with rock & roll, and understanding The Go Getters and their music requires taking into account their inextricable link to car culture. Hailing from Västerås, Sweden, where an interest in American cars and music has thrived since the '50s, the band's rural origins hold many similarities to the Americana of rockabilly lore-- chopped cars and homemade booze, for example. Go Getters bassist Morgan Fredriksson, a.k.a. "The Moonshine Master," drives a '54 Ford Customline when he's not slapping his 1904 Stradivarius bull fiddle. Peter Sandberg, in addition to being an expert pinstriper, builds his own customs. He owns a '32 Ford that he built from scratch, and maintains the band's primary touring vehicle, a '57 Ford Country Sedan station wagon. Guitarist Robin Johnson, when he's not dispensing justice from his Gretsch "Hot Rob" hollowbody, prefers the kidney-favoring ride of Harley Davidson motorcycles.

Formed in 1988, The Go Getters appeared on several compilations in the late '80s before releasing their first single, "You Don't Love Me" in 1992. Topping several European music charts, this led to their debut LP, 'Real Gone!' and fueled

a demand for the trio as a backing unit for many of the '50s biggest rockabilly stars, including Sleepy La Beef, Ray Sharp, Larry Donn, Johnny Powers, and Ronnie Dawson. Throughout the '90s they wrote and recorded extensively, building a formidable catalogue while maintaining a relentless touring schedule.

The Go Getters remain first and foremost a live act, having spent the better part of the last twelve years on the road. They frequently incorporate the unexpected into their stage show, and enjoy redlining the boundaries of conventional rockabilly expectations. That said, their first order of business continues to be entertaining the crowd--any crowd--under any circumstances, and this may have a lot to do with their ability to play and earn where other groups can find no purchase.

Sandberg and Johnson are inventive musicians with a strong vocal chemistry, but they consider themselves entertainers, attributing much of their craft to the mentoring of Ronnie Dawson, whom they've backed on numerous tours. Their between-song banter is sometimes a show in itself, and they never take themselves too seriously. As a result, they lack the pretension and purism associated with certain roots acts (rockabilly bands in particular) that struggle to distinguish themselves by engaging in a sort of battle-of-the-bands for the Crown of Supreme Authenticity-- and end up sounding exactly alike in the process. Make no mistake, The Go Getters can groove with the greasiest, but they like to have fun on stage. They'll pull out the rarest of swap-meet gems, like "Teenage Kicks" by The Undertones, and follow it with The Offspring's "Pretty Fly For A White Guy."

*It's interesting to note that when The Go Getters played Bakersfield on their last U.S. tour, they spent some time back stage with Buck Owens, another artist known to vex purists by including in his set such anomalies as "Play That Funky Music White Boy."*

While the Go Getters sound remains American at its core, the group is at the forefront of an expanding hot-rod culture that is obviously now fully international. They've played all the major festivals around the world, from the U.K.'s Hemsby Rock & Roll Weekender, to the Aitoo Midsummer Festival in Finland, to America's own Las Vegas Rockabilly Weekender (where their performance in the first year of that event was said to have raised the candlepower of the Vegas skyline to that of a nuclear test). As they embark on their sixth U.S. tour, they continue to build their reputation as a live draw.

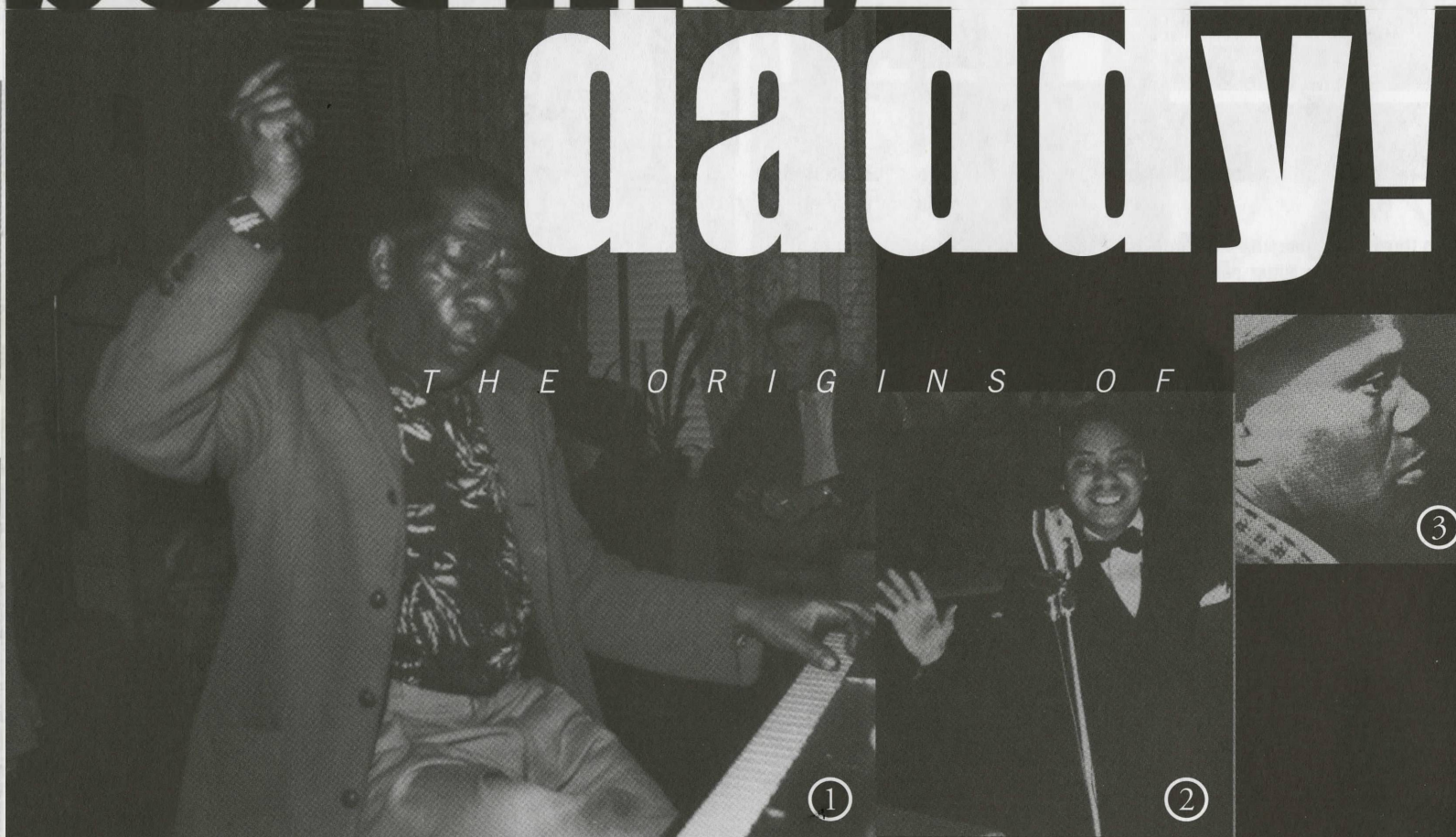
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The fascination with Boogie began for me when I overheard a friend of mine at the school piano picking out the left hand part of a piece called "JD's Boogie Woogie." From that moment it became my quest in life to play Boogie Woogie piano and learn all I could about it's history. I was already a fan of Jerry Lee Lewis's music, and recognized that this was a Boogie Woogie of sorts. However, I sensed that further back the style had existed in a pure original form.

# beat me, daddy!

T H E O R I G I N S O F



Story by **Carl Sonny Leyland**

① *Clarence Lofton*

② *Pete Johnson*

③ *Montana Taylor*

④ *Al Ammons*

# So what is Boogie Woogie exactly?

Technically speaking, it is a blues-based piano style (of African-American origin) distinguished by its repeating left hand bass figures which are played eight beats to the bar. The first record to have Boogie Woogie in the title was "Pinetop's Boogie Woogie" recorded December 28, 1928, in Chicago by Clarence "Pinetop" Smith. However, this was not the first time the style had appeared on record. In 1927 Meade Lux Lewis had recorded his classic "Honky Tonk Train Blues," possibly the greatest composition of the Boogie genre. Prior to this, player piano rolls containing elements of Boogie Woogie

had been made by pianists Jimmy Blythe, Hersal Thomas, and Cow Cow Davenport.

"New Orleans Hop Scop Blues," published in 1916, is reputedly the first sheet music to contain a Boogie bass line played in the 12 bar blues format. The tune's composer, George W. Thomas, and his younger brother Hersal, were both exponents of Boogie in its embryonic stage. Seemingly the origins go back even further. The great ragtime pianist Eubie Blake related this anecdote about William Turk: "He had a left hand like God. He didn't even know what key he was playing in,

but he played them all. He would play the ragtime stride bass, but it bothered him because his stomach got in the way of his arm, so he used a walking bass instead. I can remember when I was thirteen - this was 1896 - how Turk would play one note with his right hand and at the same time four with his left. We called it 'sixteen' - they call it Boogie-Woogie now."

So was this new style born out of a general lack of dietary restraint amongst ragtime piano players? More likely, Boogie developed in the hands of unschooled pianists who played in low places known as Barrelhouses.

# boogie

4

# woogie



These establishments flourished around lumber and turpentine camps in the rural South at the turn of the century. It was here that the lines between Blues and Ragtime blurred, allowing a hybrid to emerge. This rough, hard driving music known as Barrelhouse and its urban counterpart, 'rent party piano,' were the forerunners of Boogie Woogie.

Rent parties were social functions organized to raise house rent. The occupants of the house would charge a small admission fee in exchange for food, drink (often bootleg liquor), and entertainment. The southern barrelhouse pianists who had migrated north to St. Louis, Chicago, Indianapolis, and Detroit were in great demand at these functions. Interestingly, not much Boogie was heard in New York where Stride piano was the thing. The New York pianists shied away from what they considered an unsophisticated and inferior style, referring to it dismissively as Western piano. This is possible where the term Fast Western (an early name for Boogie Woogie) originated.

By 1935 Meade Lux Lewis was washing cars in Chicago. It had been some eight years since "Honky Tonk Train Blues" and he probably had little expectation of making records again. He was completely unaware that someone of great importance in the jazz world was looking for him.

That someone was John Hammond, a New York socialite of independent means who would go down in history as being largely responsible for the introduction of Swing music to a mass audience. The success of the Benny Goodman and Count Basie bands was due in no small part to the efforts of Hammond. He was also



⑤ *T Bone Walker & Freddy Slack*



⑥ *Meade Lux Lewis*

# boogie woogie

possibly the first promoter to attempt to present racially integrated bands such as Goodman's, which featured Lionel Hampton and Teddy Wilson.

John Hammond was a Boogie Woogie fan and considered the style a vital part of the Jazz idiom. In 1931 he had acquired a worn copy of Lewis's "Honky Tonk Train Blues" and had continued to be fascinated by it. In addition to Lewis, Hammond was seeking the composer of "Pinetop's Boogie Woogie," which he recognized as another milestone in the genre. Sadly, Pinetop Smith was already gone. However, his place in Boogie's history was set and the legend that he had originated the style would live on.

Interestingly, the same apartment building on Chicago's Prairie Avenue had been the home of Smith, Lewis and another pianist who would soon come to prominence as another Boogie Woogie great, Albert Ammons. Hammond had already met Albert Ammons and it was through Ammons that he was finally introduced to Lewis.

Hammond's immediate goal was to find a record label willing to rerecord Meade playing his "Honky Tonk Train Blues." This proved difficult, as companies rejected the tune on the grounds of it being uncommercial. Hammond looked overseas and found that the British Parlophone company was interested in the project. The new recording of "Honky Tonk Train" (as it was now titled) was issued in November of 1935.

A British reviewer had this to say: "I believe that Meade Lux Lewis is not only the most interesting musician in Jazz today, but of yesterday also. Moreover, unlike the others, he will not date: unlike any of the others, he is as much of any age as this age. You will probably be immediately struck by Meade Lux Lewis's curious left hand. I was. I hadn't heard anything like it in jazz before."

In May 1936, Hammond took Benny Goodman to hear Lewis. Goodman was so impressed that he

immediately arranged a contract with the Victor label for Lewis. Decca wanted Lewis now and he did record for them prior to the Victor session of March 1937.

Record companies were taking notice and so were other musicians. Early in 1938 the Bob Crosby Orchestra (brother of Bing) had gained wide acclaim for their version of one of Meade's tunes, "Yancey Special." The piece was a tribute to Jimmy Yancey, a player who had influenced Lewis and Ammons. However it would not be until John Hammond's "Spirituals To Swing" concert of December 1938 that Meade Lux Lewis and Albert Ammons would achieve the success they so richly deserved. They were to be joined that night by a pianist who would become the third member of what might be called the Holy Trinity of Boogie Woogie, Pete Johnson.

Hammond had discovered Pete Johnson along with singer Big Joe Turner while in Kansas City auditioning Count Basie. He had heard the two perform together at the Sunset Club and realized they would be a perfect addition to the Boogie Woogie segment of the concert he was planning.

The Spirituals To Swing concert was a fantastic undertaking but Hammond knew that the venue of Carnegie Hall would give the music a new sense of worth and credibility. Never before had the full panorama of jazz been presented in one show. The program began with Gospel singing followed by the Folk Blues of Sonny Terry and Big Bill Broonzy. There was Harlem Stride piano played by it's king James P. Johnson. The traditional jazz of New Orleans with the great Sidney Bechet was featured and so was the contemporary jazz of the day exemplified by the Benny Goodman and Count Basie Bands.

And there was Boogie Woogie! Ammons, Johnson and Lewis appeared solo and in various combinations, with Joe Turner joining Johnson for their tour

de force "Roll 'em Pete." Their set was a smash. Boogie had arrived! This was the beginning of a golden era for the Boogie Woogie trio. Following their success at Carnegie Hall they were hired for a prestigious engagement at New York's Cafe Society night club which lasted for three years.

Their numerous recordings for this period demonstrate undeniably that Boogie had reached it's artistic zenith in the hands of Albert Ammons, Pete Johnson and Meade Lux Lewis. The zenith in terms of popularity was still to come.

As the public interest in Boogie Woogie grew, two things happened. First, small companies began to record the less commercial, yet worthy talents of pianists such as Jimmy Yancey, Cripple Clarence Lofton, Montana Taylor and Cow Cow Davenport. These records received airplay too. My father remembers the music of Jimmy Yancey, especially the tune "Yancey's Bugle Call" being quite frequently requested on the American Forces Network during World War II.

Second, popular swing bands began to incorporate Boogie into their repertoires. Bob Crosby was possibly the first of the white bandleaders to try this with arrangements of Lewis's "Yancey Special" and "Honky Tonk Train." In 1938, Dean Kincade had written an excellent arrangement based on Pinetop's Boogie Woogie for Tommy Dorsey. Of course, some black orchestras such as Andy Kirk's Clouds of Joy with pianist Mary Lou Williams, featured Boogie. In fact, the first recording of Albert Ammons's masterpiece "Boogie Woogie Stomp" had been made with his Rhythm Kings in January of 1936. This is another piece based on "Pinetop's Boogie Woogie" which Pinetop had asked Albert to learn shortly before his demise.

The orchestra most responsible for popularizing Boogie with the mass audience was that of trombonist Will Bradley and drummer/singer Ray McKinley. The band's pianist Freddy Slack was

Now, I don't claim to have mentioned everybody that has a place in Boogie Woogie's history. That would take a whole book and, in fact, such a book has already been written. It is called *A Left Hand Like God* by Peter Silvester, the publisher being Quartet Books Limited (possibly out of print, but serious seekers will be able to locate copies). Another worthwhile book is *Boogie Woogie Stomp, Albert Ammons And His Music*. This is written by Chris I. Page and published by the Northeast Ohio Jazz Society. It contains some amazing photos and previously unknown facts about the great pianist.

## Recommended RECORDINGS

### • Yazoo Label

Shake Your Wicked Knees 2035 Yazoo

### • The German Topaz Label

Boogie Woogie Man TPZ 1067

### • On the British Indigo label:

Shake That Thing IGOC 2078

Strut That Thing IGOC 2031

### • The French label Classics

Albert Ammons 1936-39 Classics 715

Albert Ammons 1939-46 Classics 927

Meade Lux Lewis 1927-39 Classics 722

Meade Lux Lewis 1939-41 Classics 743

Pete Johnson 1938-39 Classics 656

Pete Johnson 1939-41 Classics 665

a convincing exponent of the style, and that, combined with the amusing, if somewhat corny lyrics of songwriter Don Raye, was a formula for success. Raye and his various songwriting partners were responsible for such tunes as "Down The Road Apiece," "The House Of Blue Lights" and "Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy." The group's biggest success was "Beat Me Daddy Eight To The Bar." The inspiration for the tune came about one night when Don Raye and Hughie Prince were listening to the Bradley band. When Ray McKinley's drum break came around, instead of playing he sang out "Oh beat me daddy eight to the bar!" After the show the two songwriters approached McKinley and asked if they could put a song together around the idea while cutting him in as a partner. The resulting record sold over a million copies within the first month of it being issued!

Soon after this, Freddy Slack left Will Bradley to form his Eight Beats. Interestingly, blues guitar great T-Bone Walker was a member of this band. Later, Slack's recording partnership with singer Ella Mae Morse produced hits including "Cow Cow Boogie" (1942) and "The House Of Blue Lights" (1946). During this period Slack also appeared in Hollywood movies such as [italics] The Sky's The Limit and [italics] Follow The Boys.

By this point the Boogie craze had swept the nation to the extent that almost every big band had a Boogie in its repertoire. Many of these interpretations verged on the ridiculous, and even the classics were not immune. Freddy Martin's Orchestra was one that recorded in this vein, producing two dubious gems in particular, "Sabre Dance Boogie" and "Bumble Boogie" (Flight Of The Bumble Bee). These were based on, but in no way respectful of compositions by Rimsky-Korsakov (who must have spun a couple revolutions in his coffin). This kind of thing, while providing a good vehicle for showing off the pianist's (in this case Jack Fina's) fancy fingerwork, was about as far removed from the true spirit of Boogie Woogie as it could possibly be.

The rot had set in. Dilution inevitably let to waning popularity as the masses looked to move on to the next trend. As swing music in general began to decline, Boogie returned to where it had come from, the Blues.

Back in Chicago, Barrelhouse and Boogie piano was still heavily featured on the race records of the day. The bands of Tampa Red, Big Bill Broonzy, Jazz Gillum and Washboard Sam were piano driven. Players like Big Maceo, Horace Malcolm, Joshua Altheimer and Little Johnny Jones continued to dominate the sound of the blues in the late forties and the early fifties.

Even in the electric blues era, Otis Spann could be heard pounding behind Muddy Waters and other Chess blues artists, as could Little Johnnie Jones with the Elmore James band. Still active were Memphis Slim, Sunnyland Slim and the great Roosevelt Sykes, a man whose career would span some fifty years from the barrelhouses of '20s West Helena, Arkansas, to the concert halls of Europe in the '60s and '70s.

From the same East Texas soil that had spawned many a Barrelhouse piano man, came Amos Milburn. They called his sound Rhythm And Blues but his first hit was "Chicken Shack Boogie." Down in New Orleans there was more ground breaking R&B by Smiley Lewis, but who was his pianist? Isidore "Tuts" Washington, whose playing could have come right from a 1929 Paramount 78 rpm. There was Little Willie Littlefield's "KC Lovin" (the original "Kansas City"), and don't forget Big Joe Turner who could still have a hit with a tune titled "Boogie Woogie Country Girl." Certainly these men paved the way for Rock And Roll but the paving stones that they laid were made of Boogie Woogie.

Neither was the old eight to the bar absent from the repertoires of Country And Western Swing artists. One example was Tennessee Ernie Ford with his "Shotgun Boogie" and "Blackberry Boogie." He even recorded duets with Ella Mae Morse, such as "Rock City Boogie." Other Westerners to boogie were Spade Cooley, whose "Three Way Boogie" was led by an accordion rather than piano, Moon Mullican's career spanned different musical genres, but his piano playing always showed the influence of Texas Barrelhouse pianists like Son Becky and Black Ivory King.

Then came Rock And Roll with Little Richard, Fats Domino (who was directly influenced by Albert Ammons and Champion Jack Dupree), the wildman from Ferriday, Louisiana, Jerry Lee Lewis, whose

left hand bass patterns were near identical to those created by Albert Ammons and Pinetop Smith some thirty years earlier, and Chuck Berry, who derived much of his guitar style from the licks of his pianist Johnnie Johnson. Indeed, it would not be inaccurate to propose that Rock And Roll was in fact a very close replica in band form of the Boogie Woogie piano style.

Into the 1960s and '70s there was enough of Boogie's influence to warrant the Rolling Stones covering "Down The Road Apiece." Even Led Zeppelin recorded a track featuring Boogie Woogie piano by the Stones's road manager and sometime piano player Ian Stewart, who was a devotee of Ammons, Johnson, and Lewis. The tune, although actually a cover of Ritchie Valens's "Ooh My Head," was aptly titled "Boogie With Stu." Another curiosity was Emerson, Lake And Palmer's version of Meade Lux Lewis's "Honky Tonk Train Blues," a piece which was almost half a century old by his time! Certainly a testament to the staying power of the style.

By the late seventies there was a whole new generation of pianists who had picked up the torch, especially in Europe. In Germany there was Axel Swingenberger and Vince Weber, in France Jean-Paul Amoreaux, in Austria Martin Pyrker, in England Bob Hall and George Green, in Holland Rob Agerbeek. All were playing good Boogie Woogie with a true authentic feeling. In America there were pianists in the Boogie tradition, although most were playing only at private gatherings.

In 1988, when I first came to America, it was my good fortune to meet men such as Charlie Castner, Tom Harris, Phil Kiely, Dick Mushlitz, and Bob Seely (a top class Boogie pianist) and share in their reminiscences of meetings with the greats of old like Ammons, Johnson, Lewis, Yancey, and Lofton. Some of the photos you see here are from their collections. Like these men and all the others who play and love this music, I believe that while Boogie may never again be a major craze, it will live on.

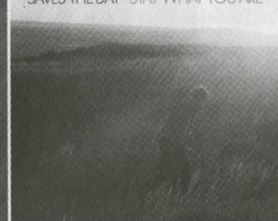
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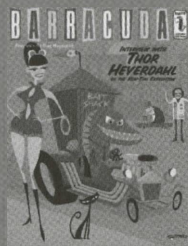
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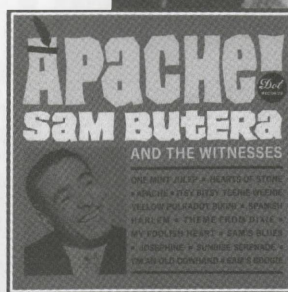
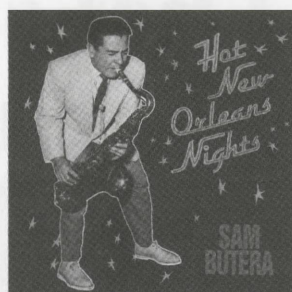
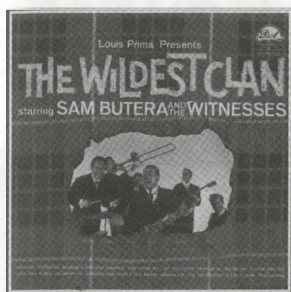
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the opportunity to get to know Sam and talk with him I  
have realized just how much of a legend this man truly is.  
I use the word legend because I feel that a man that has  
accomplished as much and has made as many contributions  
to the music world as Sam Butera has, deserves that title.

# Sam Butera

Not only did Sam, along with Louis Prima and Keely Smith, dominate the entertainment world from the mid 1950s through the early 1960s, they also broke attendance records everywhere they played and ultimately invented lounge music as we know it today. In addition to the 10 albums, 3 movies, and the numerous Ed Sullivan Show appearances with Prima, Sam has released 16 of his own albums and has also recorded and performed with the likes of Tommy Dorsey, Frank Sinatra, and Sammy Davis Jr. A legend indeed!

Let's not forget a fact that a lot of people are completely unaware of: at the ripe age of 74, Sam still tours. Until a conversation a couple of years ago with Eddie Nichols from Royal Crown Revue, I had no idea that Sam was still playing. Eddie, who is a big Sam Butera fan, told my wife and me that if we ever had the opportunity to see Sam Butera perform live we should definitely go. We finally got that opportunity about a year ago on a trip to Las Vegas. Even though we had been assured that this would be a great show we were still a

little leery about how well Sam could still perform. I have seen a few musicians that I considered to be legendary perform live before and I have walked away disappointed every time. I don't even want to talk about my Chuck Berry experience.

Just as we had been told, the show was incredible. He still blew a hard-driving sax and still has one of the best voices in music today. Including the between-song anecdotes and old school Vegas shtick, this show was just like I envisioned him and Louis Prima doing just down the street at the Sahara over 40 years ago. I am going to tell you just as I was told, if you ever have the opportunity to see Sam Butera perform live, don't miss it!

Seizing the rare opportunity to find Sam at home in Vegas, I ran a few questions by him. He was more than happy to answer them and he even sang me a verse from "When The Feeling Hits You," a song from the album that he and Sammy Davis Jr. did together.



photographed at The Derby

interview continues on page 37 > > >

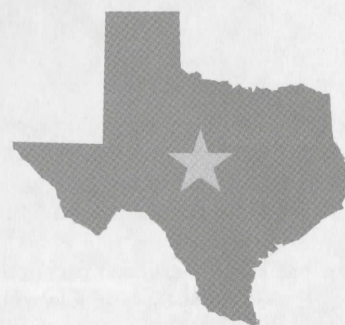
Interview by Jeff Wall

photography by George Brainard

*On December 28, 2000, Dale Watson grabbed a liquor bottle and a handful of pills and in true Country music fashion began to drink himself into oblivion. He had been depressed over the death of his fiancée in a car wreck several months earlier and it was consuming him. Unable to sleep, to relax, or to get the horror of her death out of his mind he was emotionally, physically, and spiritually wrung out. He was tired and had just about all that he could take. Fortunately, before he caught the last train south, his road manager Donnie Knutson discovered him dazed and depressed in his hotel room. Donnie figured out what had happened and took Watson to the local emergency room. Luckily no damage was done to any of Watson's vital organs and he was then transferred to a local counseling center for several days treatment.*

Donnie Knutson

Dale Watson Music  
mobile 512.585.4187  
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# nut house, “I was in the I wasn't in drug rehab or anything.”



“It’s not that alcohol got to be a problem or that I was hooked on pills. I just had some kind of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. It’s where every day was just like the first day that you went through the trauma. That’s what happened when my fiancée Terri got killed. Every morning I would wake up and it felt like it just happened. I couldn’t take it anymore so I tried to kill myself. Fortunately, I ended up in the nut house.

“While I was there, I had to get my left brain hooked up to my right brain. It sounds kind of weird, but that’s what they did. I received a treatment called REMDI which has to do with rapid eye movement and syncing up your mind with your life and helping you cope. The treatment was miraculous and I’m a new man. Now I’m just dealing with the grief in a normal healthy way. It still sucks, but at least I can deal with it now.

“I have since found out that the reason that a lot of this happens is because you are not sleeping. When Terri died, I went about three months with only a couple of hours sleep a week. That’s not good for a person. You need that deep REM sleep. When you are in REM sleep, that’s when your brain copes with your life and deals with what happened that day. My brain wasn’t doing that, instead I just got stuck like a needle in a record groove.”

News of the near-tragedy traveled fast. Dale’s situation wasn’t unique, as he explains, “When this happened to me, the e-mail response was amazing. People from all over the world were giving me strength. That’s what convinced me to put out this record. Because of so many people, lots of people have been through this same identical thing. They got a story to tell that goes right along with it and it just tears at your heart and lifts it. You think, God it’s just cool that they understand, that they really understand. I would get letters that you would think would never end, where these people would just pour their hearts out. It just goes to show you that when you think you have it bad, somebody else has got it worse.”

Dale Watson was born in Alabama to a musical family. His daddy, the late Don Watson, played music every chance he got. Dale’s brothers played as well. The family left Alabama and lived in North Carolina for a time before eventually settling in Pasadena, Texas. “I guess I inherited music from my family. My Dad played music, my brothers played, so I ended up playing too.” Watson played his first paying gig at age 14. When he was 18 he fronted a band with

his brothers before eventually striking out on his own. After a stint in Nashville and about 4 years in Los Angeles, he eventually returned to Texas where he settled down in Austin.

The music he plays is Country, although not what Nashville considers Country. This is the kind of Country that is closer in relation to Buck Owens, Merle Haggard, Conway Twitty, and Johnny Cash than it is Bryan White or Tim McGraw. Dale Watson plays songs with feelings, whether they are about cheating, drinking, trucking, falling in or falling out of love. That’s not to say his music is Retro. It’s not. Watson prefers to label it as Real Country Music. “Retro is a label they stick on it to make it easier to dismiss. It’s not Retro. I’m playing new music in old fashioned ways.”

The type of songs that you don’t normally hear on commercial Country radio. “That’s because, for the most part, radio sucks. It’s slowly getting better, but it still sucks. They’ve gotten into sugar-free country, fat-free and caffeine-free. They don’t want any music that stirs emotion or is thought provoking because the sponsors don’t like it. Because the music consultants say ‘No, that’s going to bring them down, and they might change the station.’

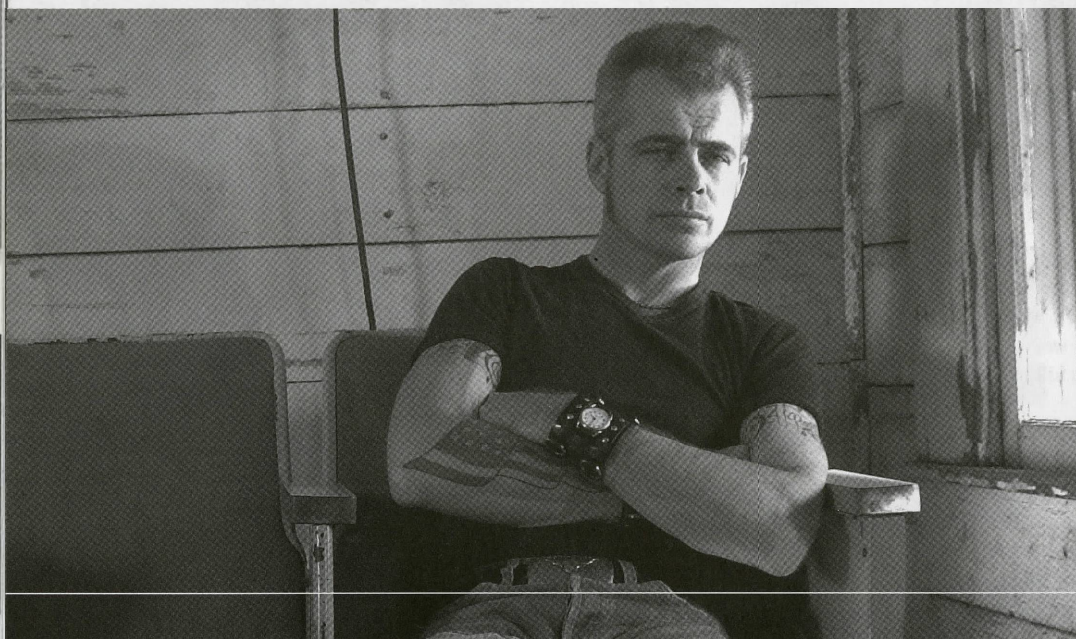
“Country Radio is getting better. They’re loosening up some. At least the smaller stations are. The big stations still have the problems they’ve always had. It’s worse than it was in the fifties when Loretta Lynn jumped in a car and went from radio station to radio station to get her record played. Nowadays you can’t even do that. The only thing she did in addition to that was live concerts. That’s what you do now. But I think the Internet is what’s going to be the saving grace of this type music. That and Satellite Radio. With those two, anyone can search out and find exactly the kind of music they want to hear, not what the consultants think they should be listening to.”

About the internet, Dale expresses, “I’m glad they shut Napster down because that’s not helping anyone. I didn’t mind them downloading my stuff because I’m relatively new and I’m not making any money off of those Hightone things, (1995’s ‘Cheating Heart Attack,’ 1996’s ‘Blessed or Damned,’ and 1997’s ‘I Hate These Songs’). In fact I’d rather them download it for free than to have to give any of their money to Hightone because I’ll never see any of it.” [Watson recently sued his old label, Hightone, over royalty issues]

Dale Watson is out of the nut house now and back to performing. He's real excited about his new deal with Audium Records. "I have three records coming out this year; 'Every Song I Write (I Write for You),' 'Live In London,' and 'Christmas in Texas.' 'Every Song I Write' was written as therapy to help him deal with the grief of losing his fiancée. "I wasn't planning on putting this record out. I recorded it for me, just because I wanted to. But then some people heard it, and I realized how important it was. It wasn't a commercial decision,

"Once I delivered 'Every Song I Write,' the label head told me, 'People are telling me that this is a depressing record, that they can only listen to it one time. There's a lot of sadness, a lot of heartache, and a lot of lost love.' I said, 'I guess "He stopped Loving Her Today," or "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry," people never gave them a second spin because they were too sad? Because those songs made them think?' He agreed with me, so he went with it. I'm not putting my songs up against those by any means but the sentiment is similar. We listen to sad songs and songs that we identify with because they don't make us feel so alone when we are feeling it. Someone else feels

"I like to play smaller clubs. Two or three hundred people in the audience is great. That's just enough so that you can still interact with the audience. We don't use a set list... I hate set lists. I'd rather have people yell out requests. That way there is more interaction. I like to see a crowd dancing. As long as they ain't line dancing. In fact, I'd rather see a man dancing with a man than to see people line dancing. That's communication and it lets you know you got them. People will line dance to anything. The songs or music don't really matter to the line dancers. We were playing up in England when someone called out a request for "Mama Tried." That's one we know so we started playing it. The floor filled up and they started doing this really strange Bird Call line dance. Stomp, Stomp Stomp Stomp, then Tweet, Tweet. Stomp, Stomp, Stomp, Stomp. Tweet, Tweet. What the hell is this? So what I did was, I kept stopping the song and start-



Now I'm just dealing with the grief in a normal healthy way. It still sucks, but at least I can deal with it now.

[www.dalewatson.com](http://www.dalewatson.com)



"It's pretty cool. I have those three albums coming out, and they are planning on doing a video or two. There's even been some mention of tour support. No bus or anything though because I know

Watson has built his fan base up by touring. He usually works Monday through Thursday in Austin playing local clubs like Ginny's Lil' Longhorn Saloon, The Broken Spoke, and a weekly gig playing Happy Hour at the Continental Club. "We do something kind of different and strange there. It's a 'You Call It' gig. Someone shouts out a song title and we make up a song right there on the spot. There's been some talk about recording it. Sometimes the songs we come up with are really good. Usually, they are just throwaways. One title I remember recently is 'My Wife Ran Off

With three ex-wives, one of which is in prison, and a stay in the local funny farm, Watson seems optimistic about his future. "I'm doing okay. I have records coming out, gigs to play and I'm doing all right. Things are looking up. We're going to Europe in the latter part of the year. The good thing about the road is it keeps me away from the ex-wife, but I miss my kids." These days Watson has a different view of success. "All I need is enough money to make the child support payments. Everything else is gravy."

*Jeff Wall has a great website called Twangzine. It's a very country oriented site with lots of good stories. You should all check it out! [www.twangzine.com](http://www.twangzine.com)*

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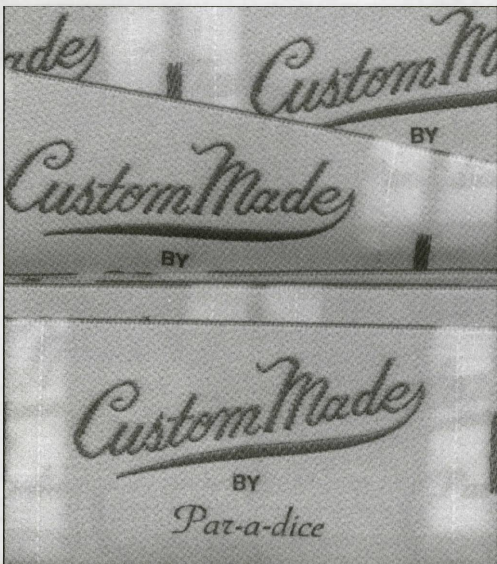
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# Sam Butera

interview continued from page 32

**GM:** What was it like to play Las Vegas during the 1950s?

**Sam:** It was like a whole new world. People wanted to hear music and be entertained. It was a whole new experience for me to work in a gambling town. The town now is not like it used to be. Back in those days a handshake was a contract.

**GM:** How has Las Vegas changed?

**Sam:** It's a whole different world. Everything is corporations or a corporate structure. In the fifties a lounge was put there for the gamblers wives or friends that didn't want to gamble. Now [Vegas doesn't] seem to care one-way or the other. They just want every department to show a profit. Even with the main show rooms they weren't there to turn a profit, they were there to draw people to the gambling tables.

**GM:** Do you feel that your audience has changed much from the audiences you played to in the fifties?

**Sam:** No, I think it's about the same. We have some kids now but even back then the kids that could sneak in came. We were playing rock and roll then but with our own style so the kids were definitely into it.

**GM:** Do you feel that your show has changed?

**Sam:** I more or less have the same format. I play what people want to hear and play requests. If someone makes a request then I want to play it. I'll stray away from my regular show and give them what they want to hear.

**GM:** Do you think you put on more of a Lounge type show now versus the Rock And Roll type of show that you put on in the fifties?

**Sam:** Entertaining is what it was about and it is the same way today. Entertainment is what were all about... plus great music. I entertain the same way now as I did then.

**GM:** What was it like to work with Louis Prima & Keely Smith?

**Sam:** It was like a dream come true, to meet someone that knew what the hell he was doing and what direction he wanted to go into. He was a lot of fire and enthusiasm. Keely Smith was the singer but Louis Prima was the entertainer. Keely was great and everybody loved her and the reason why is because she had a great voice. The part that she played back then fit her to a T. She was perfect for Louis to play off of.

**GM:** How much of the arranging did you do when you were with Louis Prima?

**Sam:** All of it. He would tell me what he wanted and I would fill it in. That was all my sound all through the years.

**GM:** What was it like opening for Frank Sinatra?

**Sam:** Frank Sinatra was like a different world. If he said go on stage and do 4 minutes, you went on stage and did your 4 minutes and got your butt off. He was very strict. There were three acts performing then: myself, Pat Henry and Frank Sinatra. Pat Henry went out and bought a big alarm clock. No matter where he was in a joke, when that alarm clock went off it was goodbye and he would walk off.

I recorded a song with Frank Sinatra called "Stargazer." It was great. It was so easy. He knew

exactly what he wanted before we went in the studio and the arrangement of course was extraordinary. He always had great arrangers write them for him. One time recording it and that was it. That's the way he worked.

**GM:** What was it like to do the album 'Sam Meets Sam' with Sammy Davis Jr.?

**Sam:** Sammy was a fun guy. I think that he was the most talented man that I have ever worked with in my life. He could do anything and do it to the max. He came to me and said he wanted to do an album and for me to do the charts. I said, "That would be a pleasure, Sammy." He told me to come out to his house and bring a pencil and some paper and he'd tell me what he wanted. When I was ready with the charts I called him and we met in Vegas and recorded it in one evening.

**GM:** Is it different for you to be the front man now?

**Sam:** It's work. I'm at the phone all day trying to book the band and get work. It's not easy but it's worth it in the end. Making the people happy and seeing them be happy is worth it.

**GM:** Do you enjoy performing as much now as you did in the fifties?

**Sam:** I do. I'm starting to slow down a little bit though. I don't drink no more. In fact, this Good Friday it will be 2 years. It's a different world when you don't drink. Musically it's a lot better but fun-wise it's not better. You perform better but you don't think you are. When you're drinkin' you can't do no wrong.

**GM:** Do you enjoy listening to any bands playing today?

**Sam:** Not really. I don't have time to listen to other people. I'm too involved with what I'm doing. If I listen to any music I will listen to tapes that I have saved through the years. Nothing new.

**GM:** How do you feel about bands like David Lee Roth and Brian Setzer doing covers of your songs?

**Sam:** David Lee Roth sucks. He copied my arrangement and I got no money. He came to see me one night and he said, "Hey Sam, I'm David Lee Roth." I said, "Ya give me my money," and he turned around and walked out. Brian Setzer I have never met. I don't know anything about him. I have never heard Brian Setzer. David Lee Roth I have no desire to hear. I have no respect for him. Look what's happened to him.

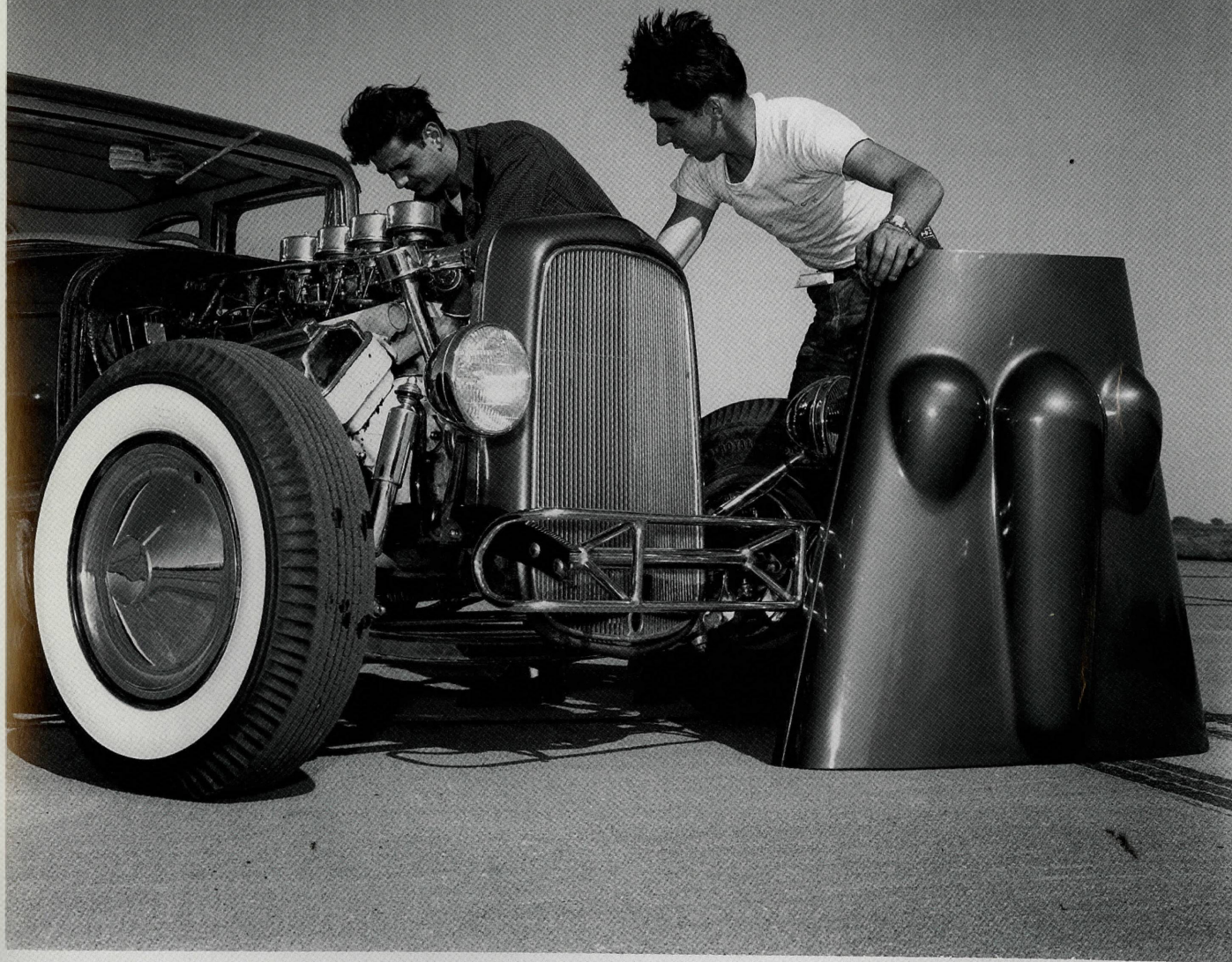
**GM:** What occupies your time when you're not on the road?

**Sam:** I watch a lot of television. I like to play golf whenever I have time. I like to be home with my family, that's what I want to do mostly.

★ *Realizing the need in this day and age for a website, Sam has recently taken the leap into cyberspace with [sambutera.com](http://sambutera.com). Sam's wife Vera once told me after seeing Sam's new website, that it was as if he was a big star.*

*To which I replied, one of the biggest...  
a true legend.*

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