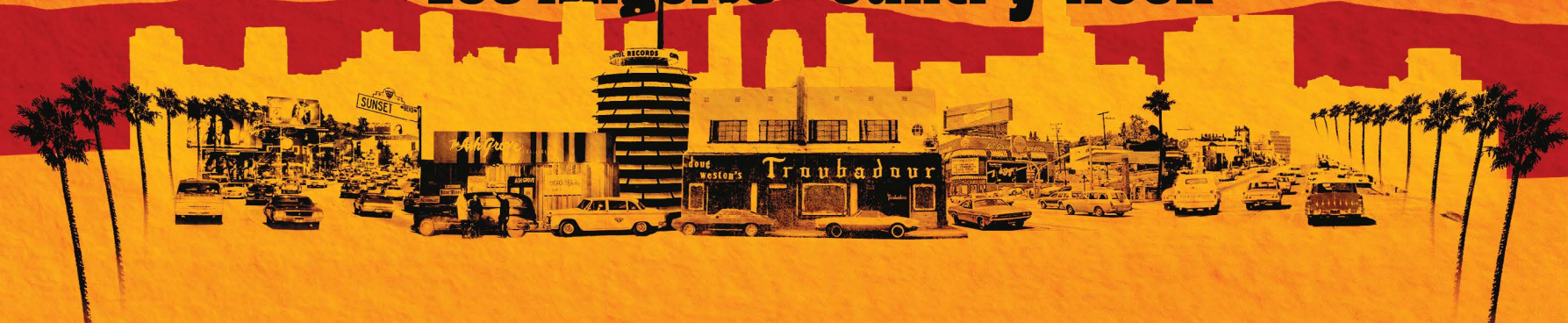
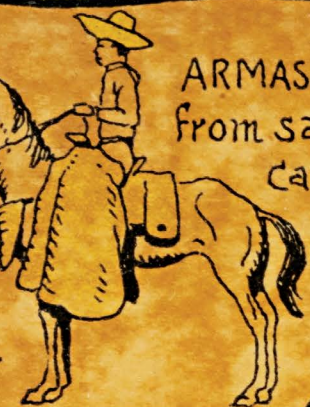




The Roots and Reverberations of Los Angeles Country-Rock





ARMAS . cowhide hanging
from saddle forks.
cactus country.
Mex.



THE '80'S
D: JOCKEYS
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RIG.

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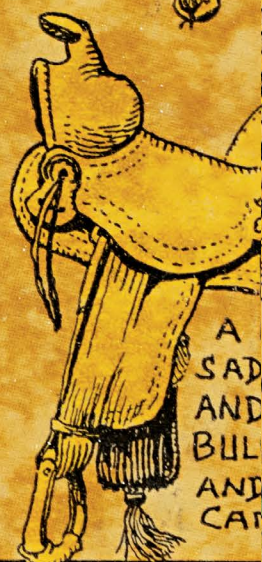
STRAIGHT UP
AND SCRATCHIN' !



I dedicate this Carte of Evolution
to The California Rodeo of Salinas
my friends How come? Oyez. Red

His saddle has changed in
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to 22 inchs wide. B
needs a working
the evolution
Stockman it

THE 20TH CENTU
BULGED FOR
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HONOR THY MUSIC®

WESTERN EDGE

The Roots and Reverberations of Los Angeles Country-Rock

FOREWORD BY LINDA RONSTADT

COUNTRY MUSIC FOUNDATION PRESS

222 REP. JOHN LEWIS WAY S • NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE 37203

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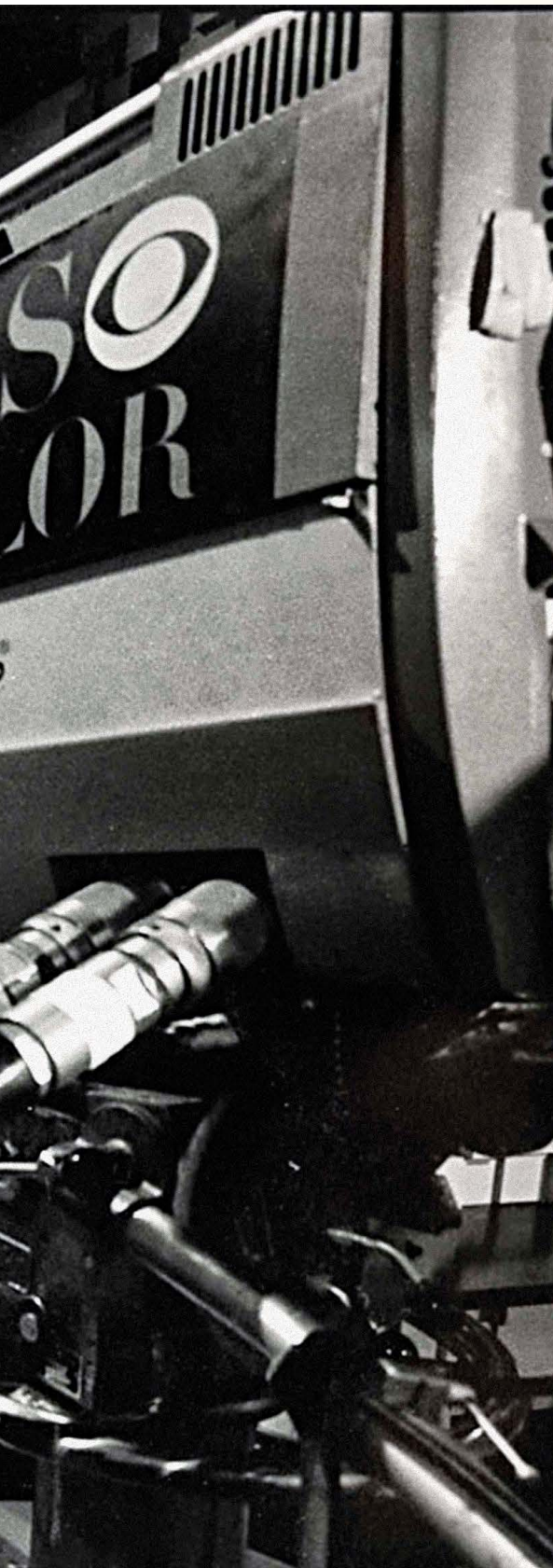
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Nitty Gritty Dirt Band on the set of *Playboy After Dark*, December 1968. Hosted by Hugh Hefner, the syndicated series was taped at CBS Television City in Los Angeles.

ON STAGE, FROM LEFT: Les Thompson, Jeff Hanna, Ralph Barr, Jimmie Fadden, John McEuen, and Chris Darrow

PHOTO COURTESY OF JOHN MCEUEN

INSIDE FRONT AND BACK COVERS: Detail of “The American Cowboy Rodeo,” the 1933 poster by California artist and cowboy Jo Mora that was the inspiration for the cover of the Byrds’ *Sweetheart of the Rodeo* album

ARTIFACT COURTESY OF CHRIS HILLMAN

DEAR MUSEUM FRIEND,

Who could have predicted that banjos and steel guitars would spark a revolution in rock & roll? Or that L.A. rockers would teach their generation and those that follow to appreciate country music?

The exhibition *Western Edge: The Roots and Reverberations of Los Angeles Country-Rock* examines a time of boundary crossing and great communal creativity, from the 1960s to the 1980s. The music that emerged from that time and that place connected not just L.A.'s close-knit musical communities; it still connects us, and reminds us of the great value in crossing the boundaries that divide us too often.

When the Byrds released the pioneering album *Sweetheart of the Rodeo* in the summer of 1968, critics and the listening public alike were baffled at first. What was this? Yet groups like the Byrds, Buffalo Springfield, the Dillards, and others were on to something that would

grow and gather strength. While we might debate the first true “country-rock” recording—and there are many contenders who were chasing the sound—what can’t be debated is the enduring power of the phenomenon. Its sounds are still with us.

The term was fraught with natural tension. Chris Hillman described “country-rock” to us recently as “a device to sort of pigeonhole you into a more descriptive place. It’s country music to me, you know. It’s all country music to me—or music.”

And it’s country music to us. And it’s rock, too. From today’s vantage point, we can take in both sides of the equation and hear harmony and no contradiction.

Los Angeles has long been an ideal spot for artists and musicians who want the freedom to mix things up. There was already a long tradition of country music

in the town, and country sounds were all around. It was only natural for some open-minded rock musicians to bring country into the mix and test their experiments onstage. Local clubs like the Ash Grove and the Troubadour, which feature prominently in these pages, and ultimately the Palomino and the Whisky, became temples and flashpoints for the new music and its evolution.

Soon record labels took notice. Radio took notice. Most importantly, musicians took notice, and they built new possibilities from what they heard.

Dwight Yoakam heard the sounds coming from L.A., moved there, and tapped into the energy of the local punk scene in the late 1970s and 1980s. There he found an audience for his brand of country music alongside others who understood the value of mixing tradition with raw energy and passion.

Dwight's presence within this exhibition and his support of it are crucial to our ability to tell the story. Likewise, Chris Hillman's involvement, perspective, and support have been invaluable.

As with all our major exhibitions, we have dug deep to present layers of storytelling, often taken straight from

conversations with those who lived those stories. We conducted twenty-three video interviews for *Western Edge*, capturing many hours of first-hand perspective, and we've collected significant artifacts that are central to the story. Many of them are featured in this book, complementing numerous historic images.

We're thrilled that Linda Ronstadt has contributed this exhibit companion's foreword and that Randy Lewis, longtime Los Angeles music journalist, has written its main essay. We are equally honored to feature supporting pieces written by Mary Katherine Aldin, Dave Alvin, James Austin, Alison Brown, Steve Fishell, and Holly George-Warren.

This is a story of a wondrous American phenomenon, one that transported us all west, to the edge of our continent, and one that brings us today to a better appreciation of what we call, simply, country music.

Sincerely,



Kyle Young | CEO

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book, and the exhibition it accompanies, benefited from the collaborative enthusiasm we encountered among many generous people in Los Angeles and Nashville.

Planning for the project began in September 2019, when Chris Hillman and Roger McGuinn joined Marty Stuart for one of his Artist-in-Residence concerts at the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum. Staff spent much of the afternoon with Chris and his wife, Connie Pappas Hillman, both of whom would assist us greatly throughout the development of the exhibit.

In January 2020, Chris Hillman sat down with us for an interview, filmed at the Troubadour in West Hollywood. The next day Chris and Connie welcomed us into their home to provide artifacts. On that same trip, we picked up artifacts related to the Ash Grove from Mary Katherine Aldin; conducted film interviews with musicians JayDee Maness, Larry Murray, and Herb Pedersen at the Grammy Museum; and met with James Austin, Bill Bentley, and Scott B. Bomar to enlist their help.

We were off to a good start until the pandemic necessitated the closure of the museum for six months and halted travel for *Western Edge*. Fortunately, several musicians we wanted to interview on camera either lived in Nashville or

happened to be traveling through Music City. Peter Asher, Rodney Dillard, Rosie Flores, Richie Furay, Jeff Hanna, Emmylou Harris, John Jorgenson, Bernie Leadon, Taj Mahal, John McEuen, Graham Nash, Jim Ed Norman, John Sebastian, JD Souther, and Lucinda Williams generously volunteered their time and shared their stories with us.

We are also grateful to Dave Alvin, Maria McKee, Louie Pérez, and Dwight Yoakam, who spoke with our curators and film crew when we returned to Los Angeles, in 2022.

Linda Ronstadt first talked to museum staff as a special guest on our podcast series, *Voices in the Hall*, in 2019. When our writers had questions specific to *Western Edge*, she generously agreed to additional interviews. Her vivid memories and keen perspectives informed the book and the exhibit alike. Janet Stark, Linda's longtime personal assistant, was especially helpful.

Western Edge is full of wonderful stage costumes, and Michael Nesmith's Nudie suit is one we hoped to feature from the outset. He died on December 10, 2021—less than a year before the exhibit opened. We are thankful he wanted his prized outfit and other artifacts to be included. We are deeply indebted to Andrew Sandoval and Robin Campbell for arranging their shipment from California.

Likewise, we had dreamed from the beginning of reuniting the Nudie suits worn by members of the Flying Burrito Brothers on the album cover of their classic debut, *The Gilded Palace of Sin*. The Autry Museum of the American West helped us procure Chris Hillman's suit. Sneaky Pete Kleinow's stage costume was loaned to us by his daughter Anita Kleinow and shipped to us from the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, where the suit had been on display. Gram Parsons's Nudie suit has long been on loan to the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum from Melanie Wells and Manuel Cuevas, who created the Flying Burrito Brothers suits while head designer at Nudie's Rodeo Tailors in North Hollywood. (The whereabouts of Chris Ethridge's Nudie suit are unknown.)

Our thanks also go to David Andersen, Pete Anderson, Joel Aparicio, Fred Aronow, Sherry Raye Barnett, Diane Bouska, Gretchen Carpenter, Kai Clark, Jon Corneal, Manuel Delgado, Dan Dugmore, Ian Dunlop, Alejandro Escovedo, Marvin Etzioni, Jimmie Fadden, Pete Finney, David Glowacki, Lynne Robin Green, Sid Griffin, Ryan Hedgecock, Tom Holzen, Jimmy Ibbotson, Los Lobos, Matt Maher, Shilah Morrow, Gunnar Nelson, Matthew Nelson, Liz Norris, Polly Parsons, Dan Reeder, Laura Sáez, Nancy Sefton, Chris and Tom Skinker, Mike Smyth, Greg Sowders, Sergio Webb, and Mary Young.

Many museum staff members devoted time and talent to the book and exhibit. Space prohibits listing them all, but some deserve special mention here. Vice President of Museum Services Brenda Colladay led the exhibition team, which consisted of exhibit curators Michael McCall, Michael Gray, and Mick Buck, Shepherd Alligood, Kevin Fleming, Kathleen Campbell, Jack Clutter, Adam Iddings, Alan Stoker, Julea Thomerson, Director of Exhibitions John Sloboda, Managing Editor Paul Kingsbury, and registrars Rosemary Zlokas and Elek Horvath. Vice President of Creative Services Warren Denney and the creative team, led by Jeff Stamper and Bret Pelizzari, including Luke Wiget, Sam Farahmand, Michael Manning, Roger Blanton, Mills Hayes, Sydney Gilbert, Arlie Birket and Debbie Sanders also deserve special mention.

Music historian Colin Escott assisted us greatly by writing copy for the exhibit interactives.

Finally, we would like to thank City National Bank for its generous support of this exhibit. Likewise, we are deeply grateful to the Metro Nashville Arts Commission and the Tennessee Arts Commission, both of which provide essential operating support that underwrites museum publications, school programs, and public programs.

SIMPLE DREAMS

FOREWORD BY LINDA RONSTADT

Country music was something I grew up with. I was immersed in a wide variety of music growing up in Tucson, Arizona. My thing is eclectic mania—I like everything, but it's important to know a musical style authentically. So, I never tried to sing anything that I hadn't heard by the time I was ten years old, because I wouldn't know it authentically. I knew and loved country music.

In fact, I discovered Hank Williams when I was five. It happened on the regular trips my family made to Mexico. A high point of those drives was stopping to eat at a place called the Halfway Station between Tucson and the Mexican border. They had fantastic burritos and a killer jukebox. Half the jukebox was in Spanish and the other

half was in English, and the English half included all these great Hank Williams records. I'd save up my quarters so I could hear Hank Williams and Trio Calaveras songs while we ate there.

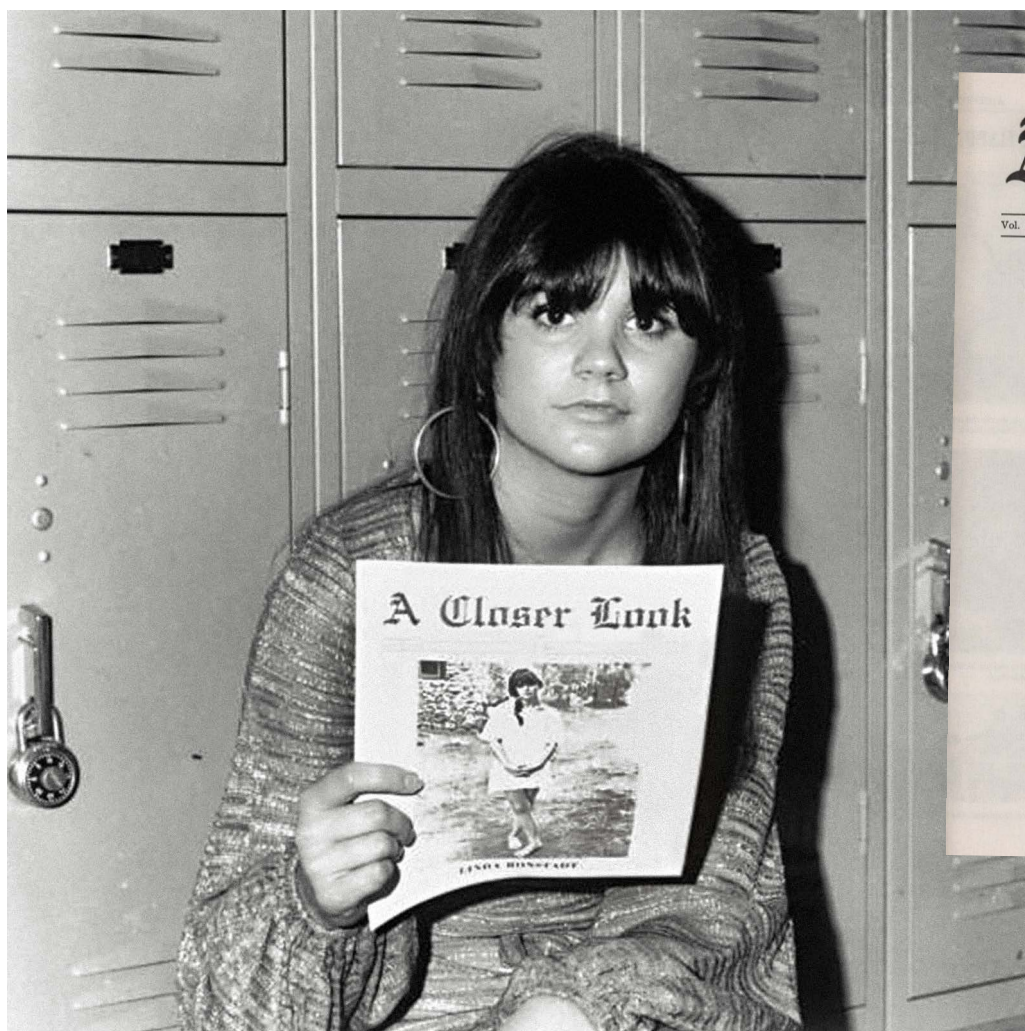
The similarities between Mexican music and country music struck me right away. For starters, both came from an agrarian lifestyle. It's about the same old stuff. You know, the cattle are cooperating or not cooperating. The fields are cooperating or not cooperating. Your wife or girlfriend is cooperating or not cooperating.

As I grew a bit older, I listened to all these great records by Hank Williams and Elvis Presley and the Everly Brothers that my sister, Suzy, had. I would stack them up on

Linda Ronstadt at New Victoria Theatre,
London, England, November 13, 1976

PHOTO BY DAVID REDFERN





the old record player with the big spindle in the middle that played 45s—in just the order I’d want them, and I’d think about it all day when I was at school. What got me through the day was knowing I would get to go home and listen to those records.

When I was in my teens, I formed the New Union Ramblers in Tucson with my brother and sister. That was

another deep dive into country music, because our banjoist, Richard Saltus, turned me on to the blood harmonies of the Blue Sky Boys and bluegrass by Bill Monroe, the Stanley Brothers, and Flatt & Scruggs. These groups came out of a real country existence, and I grew up in the country myself, so I related to that. Again, the lyrics and the rich, natural-sounding harmonies reminded me of the Mexican trios I liked.

In 1964, when I was eighteen, I first visited Los Angeles, and I was hooked, so I returned during my spring break from college in '65. The first musicians I saw live in Los Angeles were Taj Mahal and Ry Cooder—together in a band called the Rising Sons—at the Ash Grove. They had the Grove in their pocket. At that point I had never heard anything of quite that quality.

Captivated by the scene in Los Angeles, I quit college and moved there, knowing I would have more musical opportunities than I would ever have in Tucson. I didn't have much money, but I had a burning desire to sing. Shortly after arriving in L.A., I began singing harmony with Bobby Kimmel and Kenny Edwards in our trio, the Stone Poneys. We lived in a place on the beach in Santa Monica for \$80 a month, splitting the rent three ways.

Our sound evolved because of what was going on within the music scene in L.A. I heard the Byrds on the Sunset Strip, and I had known Chris Hillman from his previous



TOP RIGHT: Linda Ronstadt, January 1968

BOTTOM RIGHT: Emmylou Harris and Linda Ronstadt at Universal Amphitheatre, Los Angeles, October 1, 1977

PHOTOS BY HENRY DILTZ

OPPOSITE PAGE: When the Stone Poneys performed at Tucson's Palo Verde High School, May 8, 1968, Linda Ronstadt was photographed holding a copy of Phoenix fanzine *A Closer Look*.

PHOTO BY JOHNNY FRANKLIN



bluegrass band, the Scottsville Squirrel Barkers. I thought one day, ‘Well, if he can change from mandolin to electric bass and be folk-rock, then the Stone Poneys can do that, too.’ Because we were sort of a folky band when we started out. We were acoustic and would’ve loved to have been hired at the very traditional Ash Grove, but we weren’t hip enough. The diehard folkies at the Ash Grove were playing only blues and acoustic music. So, we auditioned at the Troubadour, which was considered more commercial—and we got a gig. The Troubadour gigs led to us finding a manager, and then a record deal.

Then, in 1966, I heard a recording of “Different Drum” by John Herald’s bluegrass band, the Greenbriar Boys, and discovered Michael Nesmith wrote the song. It had a country feel the way the Greenbriar Boys did it, but I told our producer at Capitol Records, Nik Venet, that I thought it could be a hit for the Stone Poneys—and with a more uptempo arrangement, it was.

When I first went solo, after the Stone Poneys disbanded, I turned to country songs I had known since childhood in part because I needed a new repertoire. I also thought they were good songs. They were beautifully written, well-constructed, and expressed a universal sentiment. I wanted to sing songs that expressed what I was going through in my own life at the time. Plus, they had simple

chord progressions I could play on guitar. So, I started to work up songs like Ray Price’s “Crazy Arms” and Hank Williams’s “I Can’t Help It (If I’m Still in Love with You).”

Like a lot of the musicians in L.A. at that time, I was trying to create hybrids. We were all just experimenting in those days. For instance, I recorded “Everybody Loves a Winner” back in those early days. The record had pedal steel guitar and bluegrass harmonies on top of an R&B rhythm section. That kind of approach came out of the routine creative exchanges we had going on in L.A. We all hung out at the Troubadour and jammed together, united by our mutual desire to weld country music songs and harmonies to an R&B—or rock & roll—rhythm section.

I had grown up listening to a lot of country in the 1950s, but after moving to Los Angeles my music gradually morphed into the Troubadour’s version of country and bluegrass. And I began to look for musicians who could play songs that had come out of Nashville, but with a California twist.

The Troubadour was a special spot. I remember seeing Joni Mitchell there—every show, every night, for two weeks. JD Souther, Glenn Frey, and Don Henley were also part of the scene. You’d be sitting at the bar, and pretty soon Warren Zevon or Doug Dillard or Bernie Leadon would walk in.

The Troubadour was where everybody went to hang out and be noticed. If you wanted to make yourself known to the record community at large, you would go to the Troubadour and open mic night—the Hootenanny—on Monday night. You got three songs, and if they didn't like you, they'd boo you off stage or everybody would just talk over the music. But if it was somebody good, like Bonnie Raitt or Jackson Browne, everybody would be really quiet and listen. When the Flying Burrito Brothers came onstage wearing their Nudie suits designed by Manuel Cuevas, they blew the place away. It was really great. They sparkled and glittered.

In L.A. in those days, it felt like everyone in the music community was encouraging each other. There was a certain amount of competitiveness, of course, but it wasn't bloodthirsty. We were just trying to play music with others who understood our music. It was a special time and a special community for me, as I think it was for many people—musicians and fans alike. I hope this book and the related exhibition bring you a little closer to understanding the incredible creativity and musician-ship that sprang from L.A.'s country-rock scene. And I hope it takes you back to the music we made and the freedom we felt in making it. Ω



Front and back of a Stone Poneys flyer, 1967
ARTIFACT COURTESY OF DAVID ANDERSEN

MAR 1965



ARE YOU READY FOR THE COUNTRY?

THE MULTI-COLORED TAPESTRY OF L.A. COUNTRY-ROCK 1960s – 1980s

BY RANDY LEWIS

Picture this: it's 1965. An eighteen-year-old University of Arizona freshman takes a spring-break road trip across the Sonoran and Mojave deserts from Tucson to visit a friend who'd moved to Los Angeles to chase a career in music. One night, they hit the vibrant club scene on the Sunset Strip in Hollywood to check out an exciting new band he's been hyping to her back home.

"As soon as I heard their creamy harmonies, I was mesmerized," Linda Ronstadt remembers about discovering the Byrds shortly before the band released their groundbreaking debut single, "Mr. Tambourine Man."

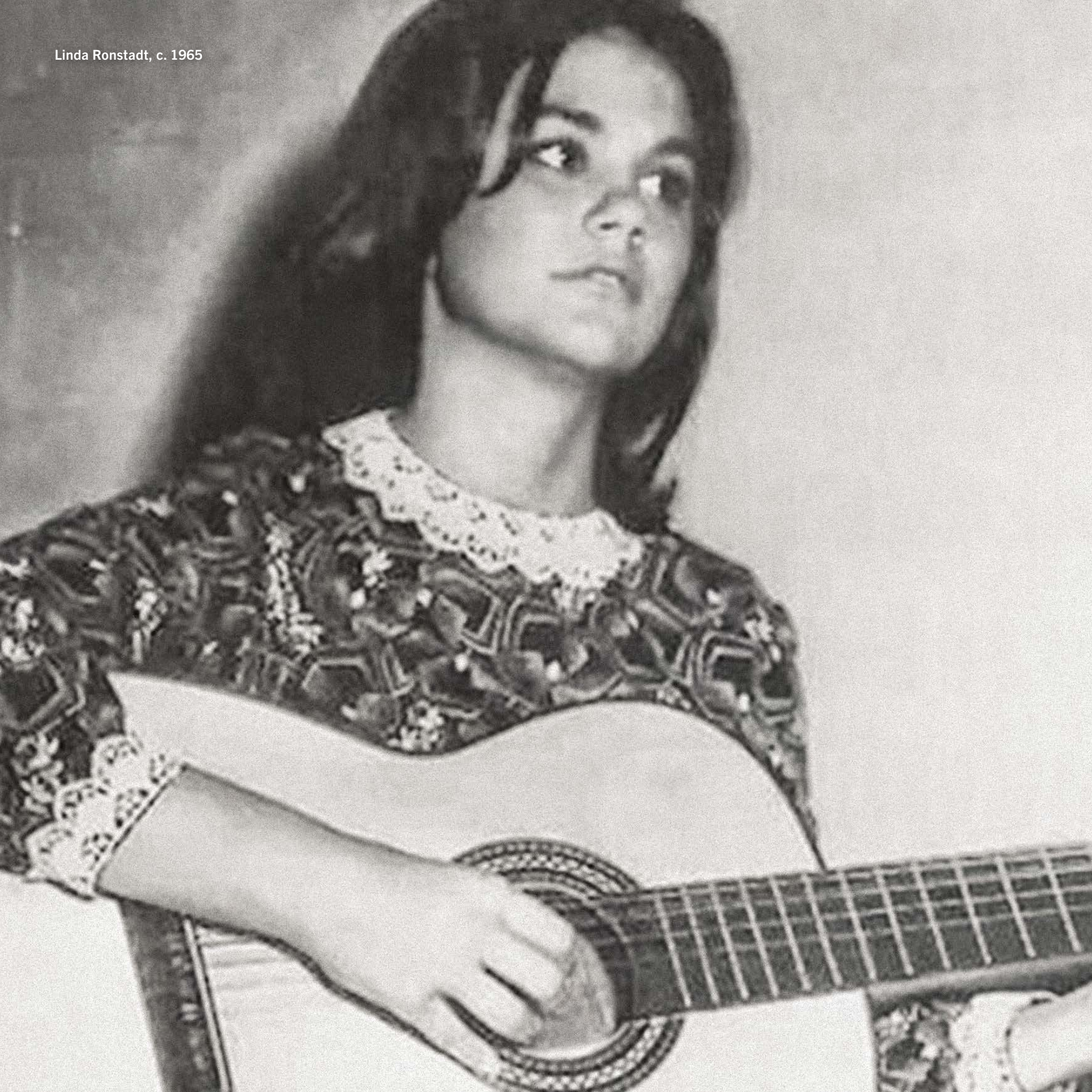
"It was clear to me that music was happening on a whole different level in Los Angeles," she wrote in her 2013 autobiography, *Simple Dreams: A Musical Memoir*.

Although she'd been making the rounds singing in Tucson's folk clubs for some time with her brother and sister, her trip west was a light-bulb moment: "I began making plans to move to L.A. at the end of the spring semester."

The sound that upended Ronstadt's life and brought her to L.A. a few months later would soon also alter the course of music of the late 1960s and explode as a dominant force in the pop world through the 1970s: L.A. country-rock.

The Byrds onstage, March 1965, weeks after recording their debut album, *Mr. Tambourine Man*. PHOTO COURTESY OF CHRIS HILLMAN

Linda Ronstadt, c. 1965



That musical marriage resulted from a confluence of factors, unique to L.A. at the time, including geography, a hotbed of musical talent, a pervasive atmosphere of experimentation, and a rapidly changing music industry.

Although Ronstadt couldn't have known it at the time, she was present at a flash point in the emergence of a fertile scene that would come to include a number of key acts: Buffalo Springfield; Crosby, Stills & Nash; Neil Young; the Flying Burrito Brothers; Poco; Rick Nelson & the Stone Canyon Band; the Dillards; the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band; Jackson Browne; JD Souther; the Monkees; Emmylou Harris; Ronstadt herself; and, in short order upon spreading out from under her wing, the Eagles.

In the years ahead, the sound would filter into country-infused pop and rock from James Taylor, Carole King, America, Firefall, Pure Prairie League, and others.

The scene that produced so many of those acts was rejuvenated in the '80s with a new jolt of energy from brash, young mavericks such as Dwight Yoakam, Lone Justice, the Blasters, Los Lobos, Lucinda Williams, Rank and File, the Long Ryders, Rosie Flores, the Lonesome Strangers, Jim Lauderdale, and the Desert Rose Band.

The West, California historian and author J. S. Holliday once said, "is the regenerative force of America." For a

period stretching across three decades, Los Angeles was a regenerative force in popular music not only nationally, but globally.

ROOTS OF A REVOLUTION: THE FIFTIES AND SIXTIES

The pioneers of what came to be known as country-rock were mostly born in the early to mid-1940s, making them preteens and teenagers at the birth of rock & roll in the mid-'50s. Not surprisingly, nearly all were enamored of the first generation of rock & rollers: Elvis Presley, Chuck Berry, Little Richard, Jerry Lee Lewis, Buddy Holly, Bo Diddley, the Everly Brothers, and others. But as the big bang of rock & roll faded at the end of the '50s, many of these fans gravitated to the folk music revival that also germinated in that decade.

First the Weavers, then the Kingston Trio, Joan Baez, and Peter, Paul & Mary grabbed listeners unmoved by pre-packaged replacements for rock's originators, i.e., "The Bobbys": Bobby Vee, Bobby Vinton, and Bobby Rydell, would-be teen idols touted to an audience in search of pop music's Next Big Thing. Their music, however, was a pale echo of that first generation. But folk music offered something meatier to a generation of aspiring musicians.

The Kentucky Colonels at Newport Folk Festival, July 26, 1964

FROM LEFT: Roland White, Billy Ray Latham, Clarence White, and Roger Bush

PHOTO BY JIM MARSHALL / COURTESY OF DIANE BOUSKA





The young folksinger who generated the most excitement once his music began seeping out of New York's Greenwich Village was Bob Dylan. The folk revival resurrected narrative storytelling in song and brought it to a new generation. Most media attention focused on the folk scene in and around New York, but a tight-knit community raised on rock but also well-versed in folk, bluegrass, and country music was simultaneously taking root in Southern California.

One of the earliest acts that would figure crucially in L.A. country-rock was the Three Little Country Boys, started in 1954 by transplanted Maine siblings Clarence, Roland,



ABOVE: Clarence White's pass from the 1964 Newport Folk Festival
ARTIFACT COURTESY OF TOM HOLZEN

and Eric White Jr. Their group became the Kentucky Colonels and realigned the traditional bluegrass lineup of fiddle, banjo, mandolin, and guitar through Clarence White's acoustic guitar mastery, pushing the instrument front and center, and out of its traditional rhythm accompaniment role.

Meanwhile, Missouri brothers Doug and Rodney Dillard, along with bandmembers Mitch Jayne and Dean Webb, moved to L.A. in search of the Ash Grove, the fabled epicenter for blues, folk, and gospel music. Almost miraculously, within a few days of arriving, the Dillards landed a performance slot at the Hollywood club that led to a recording contract and a featured role on *The Andy Griffith Show* portraying local family band the Darlings and winning the Dillards national television exposure.

Vern and Rex Gosdin, who hailed from Alabama, helped form the Golden State Boys, a skilled young Southern California bluegrass group. The ensemble soon recruited a hotshot young mandolinist named Chris Hillman.

Hillman had made a name for himself in the Scottsville Squirrel Barkers, a San Diego-based bluegrass ensemble formed in the early 1960s by guitarist Larry Murray and bassist Ed Douglas out of their music store, the Blue Guitar, home to a thriving folk-bluegrass-country music scene one hundred miles south of L.A.





RIGHT: Faux-buckskin shirt worn by Rodney Dillard onstage with the Dillards, c. 1964

ARTIFACT COURTESY OF RODNEY DILLARD

ABOVE: The Dillards with actor Andy Griffith, c.1964.

The Dillards portrayed the Darlings, a bluegrass-picking family, in six episodes of *The Andy Griffith Show*, 1963–66.

FROM LEFT: Rodney Dillard, Doug Dillard, Griffith, Mitch Jayne, and Dean Webb

PHOTO COURTESY OF RODNEY DILLARD

OPPOSITE PAGE: Rodney Dillard played this 1963 Martin D-28 with the Dillards on *The Andy Griffith Show* and on most of their albums.

ARTIFACT COURTESY OF RODNEY DILLARD





Out of the woods

...and ready for the Big City!

- ✓ 30 COLLEGE CONCERTS IN 34 DAYS
- ✓ NOW RECORDING FOR CAPITOL RECORDS
- ✓ HOLLYWOOD BOWL—SELL OUT
- ✓ BROKE ALL PREVIOUS GROSS RECORDS—CLUB EXODUS—Denver
- BROADMORE HOTEL—Colorado Springs

NATIONAL T.V.

- JUDY GARLAND SHOW
- 6 ANDY GRIFFITH SHOWS
- ABC-TV HOOTENANNY
- LLOYD THAXTON SHOW
- AND—
- TENNESSEE ERNIE FORD

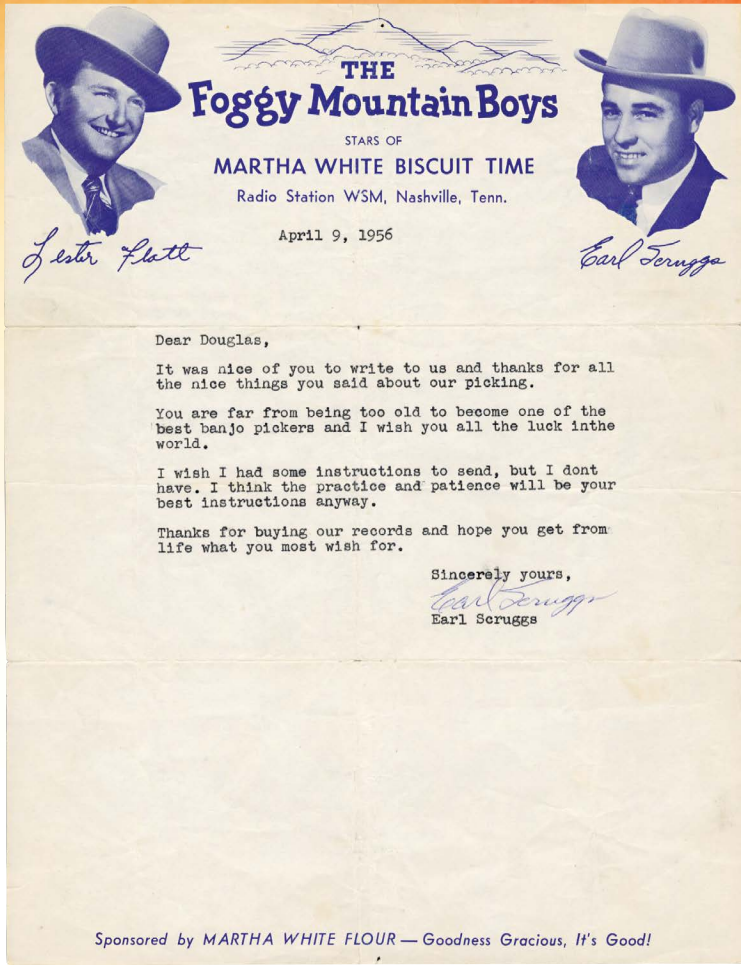
THE DILLARDS

Personal Management
BAKER/REARDON & Associates
9255 Sunset Blvd.
Los Angeles 69, Calif.

March 27, 1965 • Billboard Music on Campus

To the north in Berkeley, the Pine Valley Boys took note of what was happening down L.A. way, and some of its members soon moved south—among them guitarist-singer Herb Pedersen, who struck up a lifelong friendship and musical collaboration with Hillman.

By 1965, with Dylan rapidly morphing from acoustic folksinger to electric rocker, folk-minded L.A. players also began plugging instruments in and bringing more



THE Foggy Mountain Boys

STARS OF
MARTHA WHITE BISCUIT TIME
Radio Station WSM, Nashville, Tenn.

April 9, 1956

Lester Flatt *Earl Scruggs*

Dear Douglas,

It was nice of you to write to us and thanks for all the nice things you said about our picking.

You are far from being too old to become one of the best banjo pickers and I wish you all the luck in the world.

I wish I had some instructions to send, but I don't have. I think the practice and patience will be your best instructions anyway.

Thanks for buying our records and hope you get from life what you most wish for.

Sincerely yours,
Earl Scruggs
Earl Scruggs

Sponsored by MARTHA WHITE FLOUR — Goodness Gracious, It's Good!

driving rhythms to bear. The Dillards, the Whites, Hillman, and others found a more welcoming attitude in L.A. toward new ideas, approaches, and instrumental adventurousness.

Dazzling instrumental proficiency among younger players like Doug Dillard, Clarence White, and Hillman brought new energy to bluegrass. Rich harmony singing, also a staple of folk and bluegrass, became a signature

CONTINUED ON PAGE 29

Artist Earl Newman created this silk-screened poster for the Blue Guitar, the San Diego instrument and repair shop where the Scottsville Squirrel Barkers rehearsed and first performed, c. 1962.

ARTIFACT COURTESY OF CHRIS HILLMAN

OPPOSITE PAGE, FROM LEFT:

This advertisement ran in *Billboard*'s "Music on Campus" issue, March 1965.

Banjo virtuoso Earl Scruggs of bluegrass pioneers Flatt & Scruggs sent this letter of encouragement to nineteen-year-old Doug Dillard in 1956.

ARTIFACTS COURTESY OF LYNNE ROBIN GREEN



FOUNDATIONS OF A MOVEMENT

BY HOLLY GEORGE-WARREN

The country-rock scene that emerged in Southern California in the 1960s and 1970s had origins that reached back decades earlier. Los Angeles had been steadily growing as a key entertainment center since the 1910s, when the film industry took root in Hollywood. The town's movie industry was already in full flower in 1934, when Texan Gene Autry, a handsome, twenty-six-year-old recording artist, came west for a cameo in his first motion picture, *In Old Santa Fe*—a milestone in the rise of country music culture in Southern California.

Autry did not star in that movie, but he stole the picture with his singing, and within a year he sparked a fifteen-year boom of “musical westerns”—also known as singing cowboy movies—in Hollywood. From 1935 until he enlisted in the Army Air Corps in 1942, Autry would



Country Music Hall of Fame member Gene Autry, 1935

OPPOSITE PAGE: Western-wear designer Nathan Turk made this cowgirl costume for Rose Maddox of the Maddox Brothers & Rose.



regularly appear high on the list of Hollywood's biggest stars at the box office. He also made records that sold in the millions, including "South of the Border," "Mexicali Rose," and his theme song, "Back in the Saddle Again."

Autry's broad appeal enticed nearly every Hollywood studio to try singing cowboy movies, and a number of charismatic cowboys followed in his footsteps, including Roy Rogers and Tex Ritter. Women also made inroads: Rogers's co-star Dale Evans, a Texan who had begun her career as a big band singer, married her leading man and became the "Queen of the West" alongside America's "King of the Cowboys" in movies and on television. In the process, country & western music (as it was then known) was heard and seen across the U.S.

Both the allure of working in singing cowboy movies and the scourge of the 1930s Dust Bowl droughts spurred many rural southwestern and southern musicians to relocate to California in search of riches and stardom. Among them was a destitute farming family from Boaz, Alabama, who hitchhiked to California. In 1937, they traded their migrant produce-pickers' sacks for musical instruments and became a family band known as the Maddox Brothers & Rose, featuring young sister Rose on full-throated vocals. They were trendsetters in two key ways: they wore wildly decorative stage costumes made by Nathan Turk (inspiring their nickname "the Most



The Country Boys at the Riverside Rancho dance hall, Glendale, California, 1954. From left: Eric White Jr., Roland White, Joanne White, and Clarence White. PHOTO COURTESY OF DIANE BOUSKA

TOP, FROM LEFT: Fred Maddox, Rose Maddox, and Cal Maddox of the Maddox Brothers & Rose in the 1940s

Colorful Hillbilly Band in America”), and they played a raucous, rhythmic blend of country music, western songs, and hillbilly boogie that pointed the way to rock & roll.

World War II brought yet more transplants to California, including those stationed there in the armed forces or working in munitions plants. Taking advantage of this young, transplanted audience hungry for country sounds, competitive western swing bandleaders Spade Cooley and Bob Wills each led big bands that packed the popular Venice Pier Ballroom and San Fernando Valley dance halls. Near Griffith Park in L.A., the massive Riverside Rancho (with a 10,000-square-foot dance floor) opened in the early 1940s, hosting regular Spade Cooley shows and, later, a fifteen-year residency by Cooley’s former vocalist Tex Williams.

When Capitol Records opened for business in Hollywood in 1942, the label took note of the burgeoning demand and signed top country & western acts alongside their pop artists. These included Tex Ritter, Tex Williams, Merle Travis, Jimmy Wakely, Hank Thompson, and Tennessee Ernie Ford. When producer Ken Nelson assumed A&R duties at Capitol in 1951, he recruited several talented Bakersfield-based artists—Buck Owens, Merle Haggard, Jean Shepard, and Tommy Collins among them—to the Capitol label. The hard-country edge and broad musical range of such performers planted seeds of influence for

country-rockers. During the 1950s and early 1960s, California continued to broadcast a wealth of country music via popular 1950s television programs. Based in Compton's Town Hall auditorium, the locally broadcast *Town Hall Party* offered a colorful cast of seasoned players from 1953 to 1961, including master guitarist Joe Maphis and his wife, Rose Lee; proto-rockabilly Skeets McDonald; and young rockabilly siblings the Collins Kids. Meanwhile, on ABC-TV *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet* introduced all of America to young Ricky Nelson, who went from singing on the program to making appealing rockabilly as well as pop-rock records ("Poor Little Fool," "Travelin' Man") that topped the national pop charts and featured the hot guitar work of Joe Maphis and James Burton.

These musical styles, and the musical ambience they shared, had a far-reaching impact on musicians in Southern California. The smooth harmonies of the singing cowboys; the keening pedal steel parts of Ralph Mooney on records by Buck Owens and Merle Haggard; the stunning guitar work of Merle Travis, Joe Maphis, and James Burton; the rocking energy of the Maddox Brothers & Rose and the Collins Kids—all of these elements had their effect on the musicians who made country-rock sing in Southern California and paved the way for their experiments. Ω

This double-neck Mosrite electric guitar was built for Joe Maphis, a virtuoso musician and *Town Hall Party* cast member.







CONTINUED FROM PAGE 22

for several L.A. groups—as Ronstadt’s first impression of the Byrds attests, and as subsequent music from Poco, Crosby, Stills & Nash, and the Eagles proved throughout the ’70s and beyond.

THE LINCHPIN: CHRIS HILLMAN

If there’s a linchpin figure in the story of L.A. country-rock, it’s hard to think of anyone more critical than Chris Hillman.

“Yeah, we all know how great he was in the Byrds, but his contributions go well beyond that,” said the late Tom Petty, the lifelong Byrds fan who produced Hillman’s 2017 solo album, *Bidin’ My Time*. “Chris was a true innovator—the man who invented country-rock. Every time the Eagles board their private jet, Chris at least paid for the fuel.”

Growing up in north San Diego County’s rural enclave of Rancho Santa Margarita, Hillman was mesmerized, as so many of his contemporaries were, by Elvis Presley’s 1956 appearance on *The Ed Sullivan Show*. But he wasn’t motivated to start playing until the folk revival hit, his interest fueled largely by his older sister’s record collection.

Chris Hillman, c.1965. PHOTO COURTESY OF CHRIS HILLMAN



The Golden State Boys, 1963. FROM LEFT: Chris Hillman, Don Parmley, Rex Gosdin, and Vern Gosdin

Upon discovering the music of bluegrass, Hillman fell in love with the mandolin and started playing bluegrass with like-minded San Diego pals: banjo player Kenny Wertz and guitarist Gary Carr, who soon invited him to sit in with them, Larry Murray, and Ed Douglas in the Squirrel Barkers.

“Just getting up to play was a thrill,” Hillman wrote in his 2020 autobiography, *Time Between: My Life As a Byrd*,

Burrito Brother, and Beyond. “If we made any money, that was an extra treat.”

In addition to his direct impact across the 1960s, '70s, and '80s as a founding member of the Byrds; the Flying Burrito Brothers; Stephen Stills's Manassas; the Souther-Hillman-Furay Band; McGuinn, Clark & Hillman; and the Desert Rose Band, he was a catalyst for many others' careers.



Not the least among those were Buffalo Springfield, whose career took off after Hillman persuaded Whisky a Go-Go co-owner Elmer Valentine to hire the band. He also brought Gram Parsons into the Byrds, then started the Flying Burrito Brothers with him, en route to introducing Parsons to a female singer with whom he would make music history: Emmylou Harris. When Hillman and McGuinn fired David Crosby from the Byrds, it opened the door for Crosby to join Buffalo Springfield alum Stephen Stills and the Hollies' Graham Nash in one of rock's first supergroups, Crosby, Stills & Nash.

"Nobody really knew who [Chris] was when he was in the Byrds," Crosby told the *Los Angeles Times* in 2017. "At the beginning he was just standing there playing bass. But as soon as he started writing and singing, people figured out, 'Oh, I get it.' Then when he did . . . the Desert Rose Band, it was plain he was excelling as a singer and a songwriter. He was the whole package."

Dwight Yoakam takes it a step farther: "Without Chris Hillman acting as the connective tissue between West Coast country music traditions, and the rock & roll generations, from Buck Owens to the Byrds," he once wrote, "there would be no modern country music."

This 1958 Martin D-28 belonged to Chris Hillman's first musical mentor, Bill Smith. A custodian at Hillman's San Diego high school, Smith gave the teenager what Hillman later called "the start of my formal education" in country and bluegrass music.

ARTIFACT COURTESY OF CHRIS HILLMAN



THE BYRDS TAKE FLIGHT

Historian J. S. Holliday's idea about the West's regenerative powers manifested frequently in '60s L.A., not just musically but also in the national fascination with Southern California surf culture, fashion, custom hot rods,

and an aerospace industry feverishly working to help put human beings on the moon before the decade ended. In music circles, tradition was understood and respected, but new frontiers beckoned. "Back east, most of the great bands were from the Carolinas or Kentucky or



TOP: The Byrds' recording of Porter Wagoner's 1955 country hit "Satisfied Mind" was included on this EP, released in Portugal in 1967.

RIGHT: The Byrds at Chris Hillman's house in Laurel Canyon, 1965.

FROM LEFT: Hillman (below), Roger McGuinn, Gene Clark, David Crosby, and Michael Clarke

OPPOSITE PAGE: The Byrds sign autographs in England during their first European tour, 1965.

FROM LEFT: David Crosby, Chris Hillman, Gene Clark, Roger McGuinn, and Michael Clarke

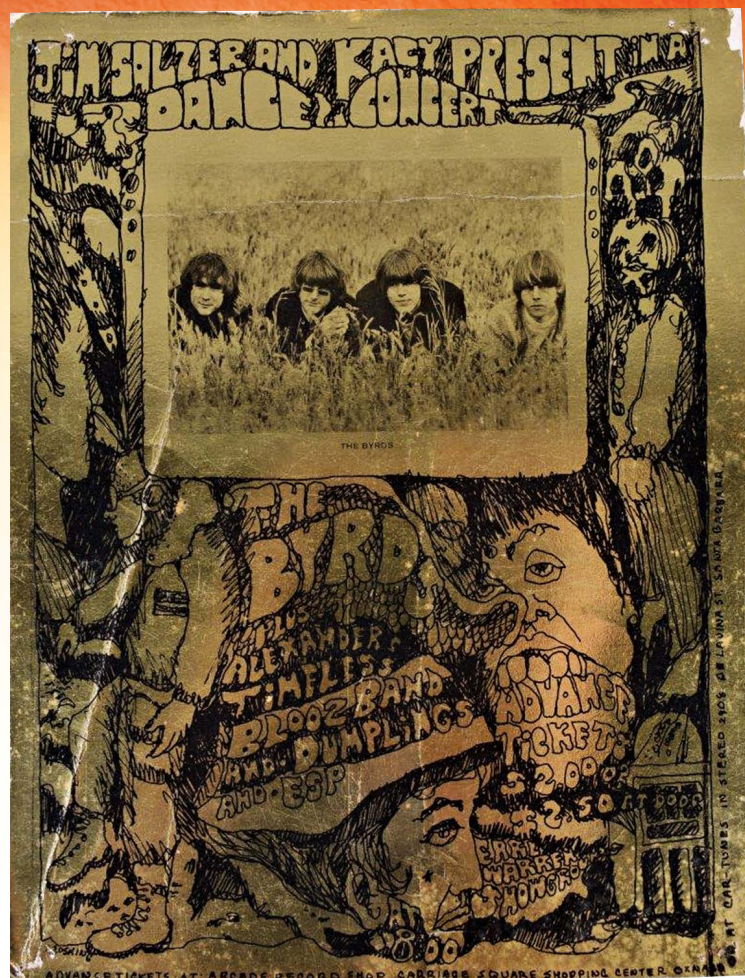
ARTIFACT AND PHOTOS COURTESY OF CHRIS HILLMAN





FROM LEFT: The Byrds at Columbia Studios in Hollywood, January 1965.
From left: Roger McGuinn, Chris Hillman, Gene Clark, David Crosby,
and Michael Clarke

Tennessee, and they all would play at the same places, so their sound was pretty similar,” recalled Pedersen, who briefly subbed for banjo master Earl Scruggs while the latter underwent hip surgery, affording him the chance to apprentice with Lester Flatt—and to experience first-hand the difference between the eastern bluegrass world and what he was part of out west.

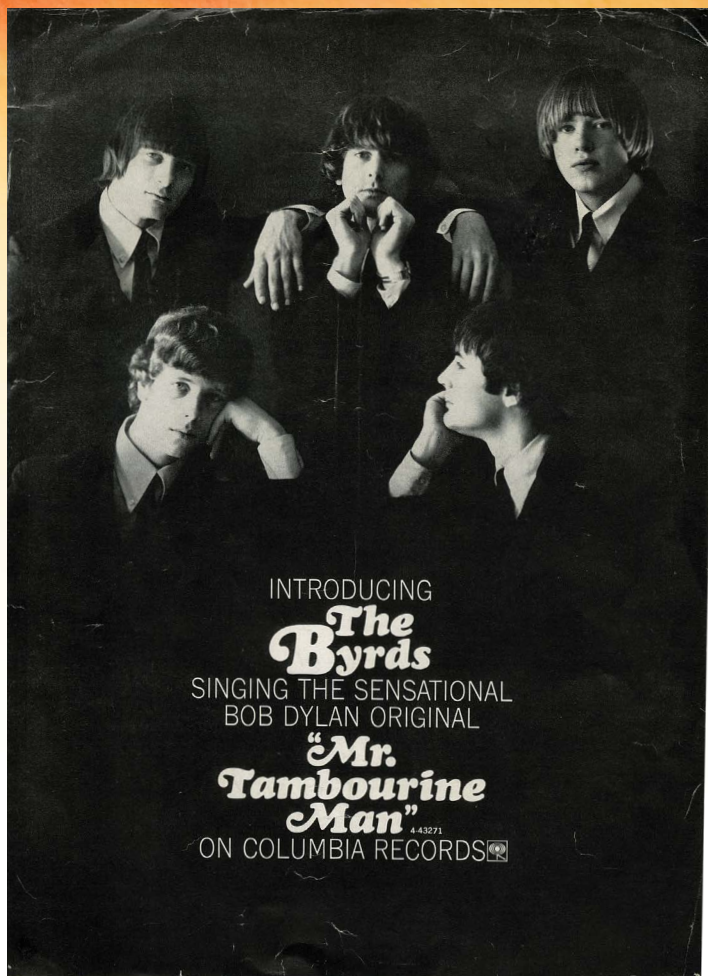


This gold foil flyer promoted the Byrds’s concert at the Earl Warren Showgrounds, Santa Barbara, California, April 15, 1967.

ARTIFACT COURTESY OF CHRIS HILLMAN

“They were a little stricter back in the Southeast,” he said.
“They wanted to stay really close to the traditional sound.”

Not so in L.A., where winds of change were as forceful as the gusting Santa Anas blowing hot from the north. The Beefeaters started in 1964 as yet another folk trio, but quickly shifted gears. The powerhouse trio of singers



Advertisement for the Byrds' groundbreaking debut single, "Mr. Tambourine Man," released April 12, 1965

ARTIFACT COURTESY OF CHRIS HILLMAN

—Roger McGuinn, Gene Clark, and David Crosby—added drummer Michael Clarke and started veering more toward rock, prompting manager Jim Dickson to invite Hillman to a rehearsal.

"They thought they had their lineup, but Crosby wasn't comfortable playing bass and wanted to switch to guitar,"

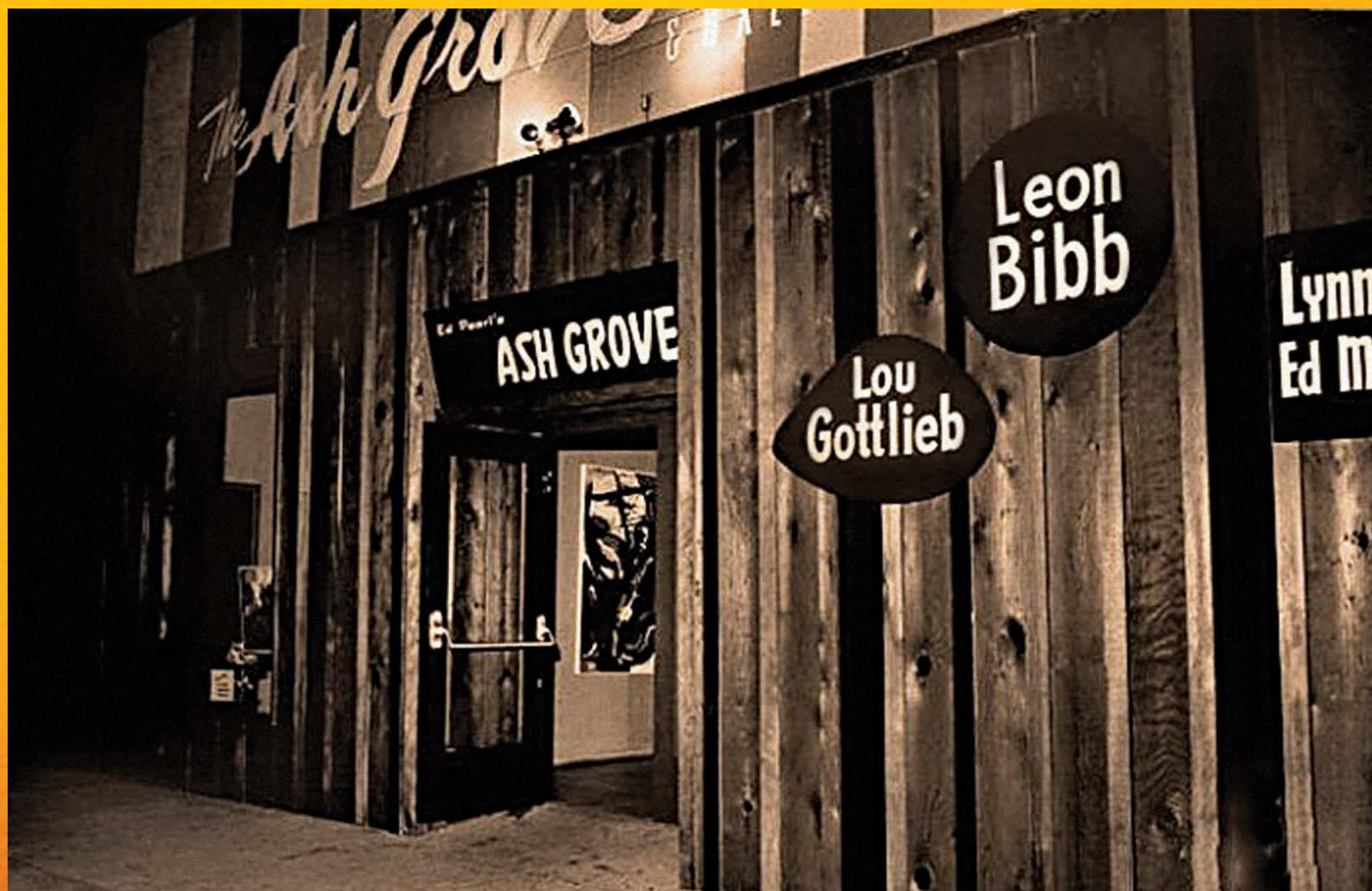
Hillman wrote. "Then Dickson asked me a question that would change the course of my life: 'Can you play bass?'"

"I had never held a bass, let alone played one," Hillman recalled. "I replied, 'Sure I can handle it.'" His mandolin skills translated quickly, and he soon became one of the most melodically inventive bassists in rock. Before the Byrds recorded their first single—Dylan's "Mr. Tambourine Man," which almost single-handedly ushered in "folk-rock"—Dickson offered his young charges a priceless bit of advice: "You guys need to go for substance and depth. Make records you can be proud of—records that can hold up for all time. Are we making an artistic statement or just going for a quick buck?"

That attitude dovetailed with Hillman's, and many others in L.A.'s creative community. But it was unusual coming from a talent manager. Pop music was still largely considered disposable, and the guiding principle on the business side was, in essence, get it while you can, however you can.

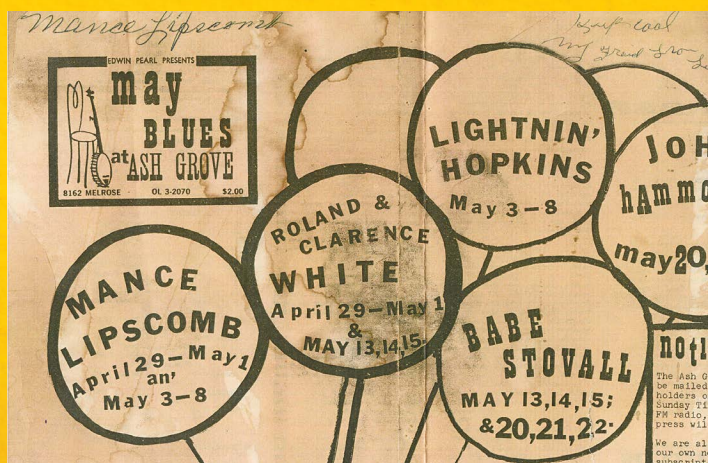
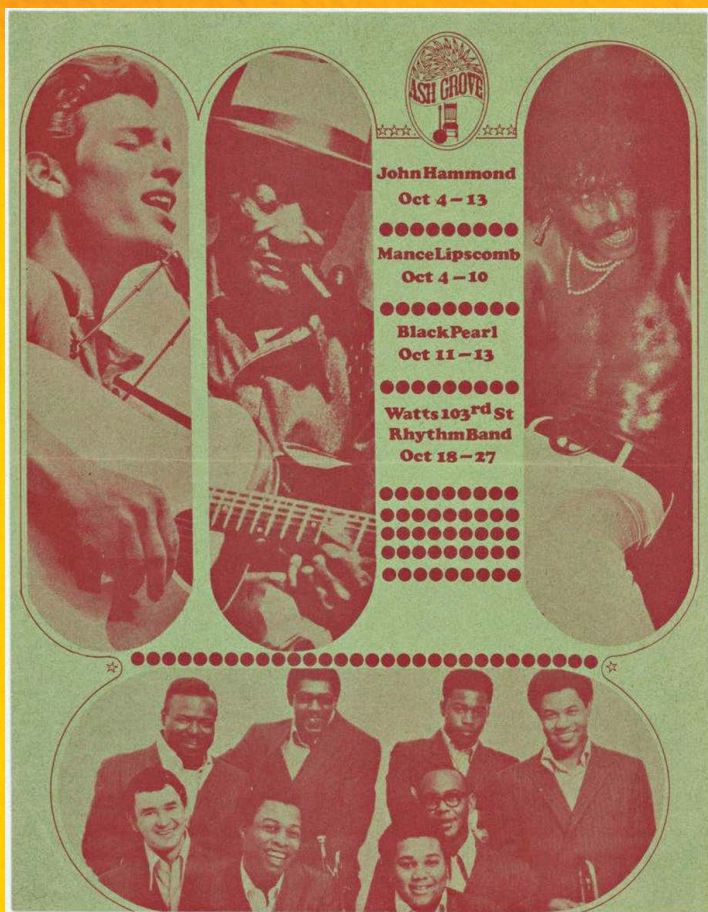
The quantum leap the Byrds made from folk to rock, from acoustic instruments to those enlivened by alternating current, was set to music by McGuinn and Hillman in what became one of the Byrds' cornerstone songs: "So you want to be a rock & roll star?/Then listen now to what I say/Just get an electric guitar/Then take some time and learn how to play."

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L.A.'S ROOTS MUSIC JUNCTION: **THE ASH GROVE**

BY MARY KATHERINE ALDIN



Advertisements for blues, bluegrass, and R&B acts appearing at the Ash Grove in the 1960s

ARTIFACTS COURTESY OF DAVID ANDERSEN AND FRED ARONOW

OPPOSITE PAGE: The Ash Grove, 1959

In 1958, folk music in the United States was on the cusp of something huge. That year, the Kingston Trio released their first album and their million-selling hit song, “Tom Dooley.” College kids from California to Maine bought guitars and banjos and learned their first three chords, sowing the seeds of the folk music boom of the mid-1960s. Cafe and club owners across the country, sensing the surge of interest, capitalized on it, and in 1958, three major folk music clubs opened for business: the Gaslight Cafe in New York’s Greenwich Village, Club 47 in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and the Ash Grove in Los Angeles.

Unlike the two East Coast venues, which presented primarily contemporary folk sounds, the Ash Grove was strong on tradition. Owner Ed Pearl was knowledgeable about traditional music, having taken guitar lessons from Bess Lomax Hawes and presented Pete Seeger in concert. So when, on July 11, 1958, at age twenty-six, he opened the Ash Grove at 8162 Melrose Avenue, on the former site of a furniture factory, it was with the intention of showcasing traditional folk, blues, and country music. Before long, the 200-seat club was booking such giants as Howlin’ Wolf, Muddy Waters, Doc Watson, and Bill Monroe, and eventually their acolytes—the Byrds, the Flying Burrito Brothers, the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, and Jackson Browne.

I worked at the Ash Grove from approximately 1962 through 1972. For the princely sum of \$25 a week (later raised to \$50), I worked with Ed Pearl in the club's office during the day, handling a variety of clerical chores. At night, I absorbed the different styles and sounds in the front concert room while I acted as part-time cashier, my office having been commandeered for a dressing room.

The music in that front room attracted many young musicians who would form the nucleus of country-rock. It started with bluegrass. In late 1962, Ed Pearl heard of a family band called the Country Boys and offered them a job. Brothers Clarence, Roland, and Eric White fronted the band, and by the time they changed their name to the Kentucky Colonels they were becoming widely recognized for Clarence's unparalleled lead guitar work and Roland's mandolin expertise. In the audience at various times to hear them were Bernie Leadon, Jerry Garcia, and Chris Hillman, who met Clarence there; in later years, Chris would bring Clarence into the Byrds as their lead guitarist.

Another bluegrass band that pioneered country-rock and got off to a running start at the Ash Grove was the Dillards, whom Ed first heard playing informally in the lobby. At their first paid gig at the club, producer Jim Dickson signed them to make an album, and a television producer (who just happened to be in the audience) tapped them for *The Andy Griffith Show*, to appear as



Earl Newman designed this silk-screened poster for the Ash Grove.

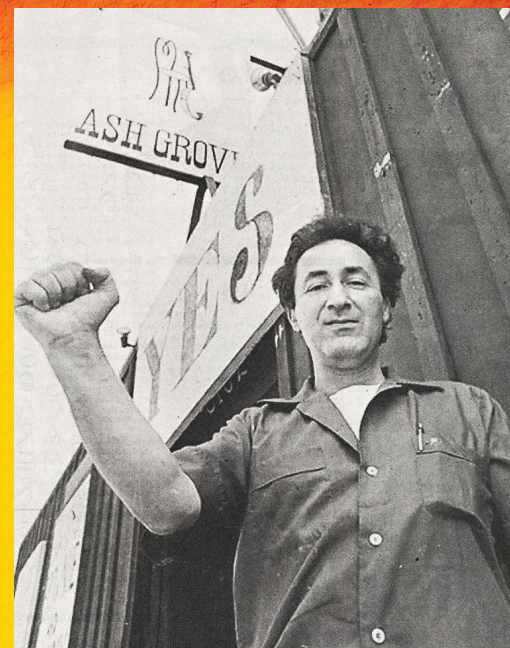
ARTIFACT COURTESY OF MARY KATHERINE ALDIN

OPPOSITE PAGE: Flyer for appearances by guitarist Doc Watson and the band Kaleidoscope at the Ash Grove, 1967

ARTIFACT COURTESY OF DAVID ANDERSEN

Ash Grove owner Ed Pearl in front of his club, 1969

COURTESY OF FRED ARONOW



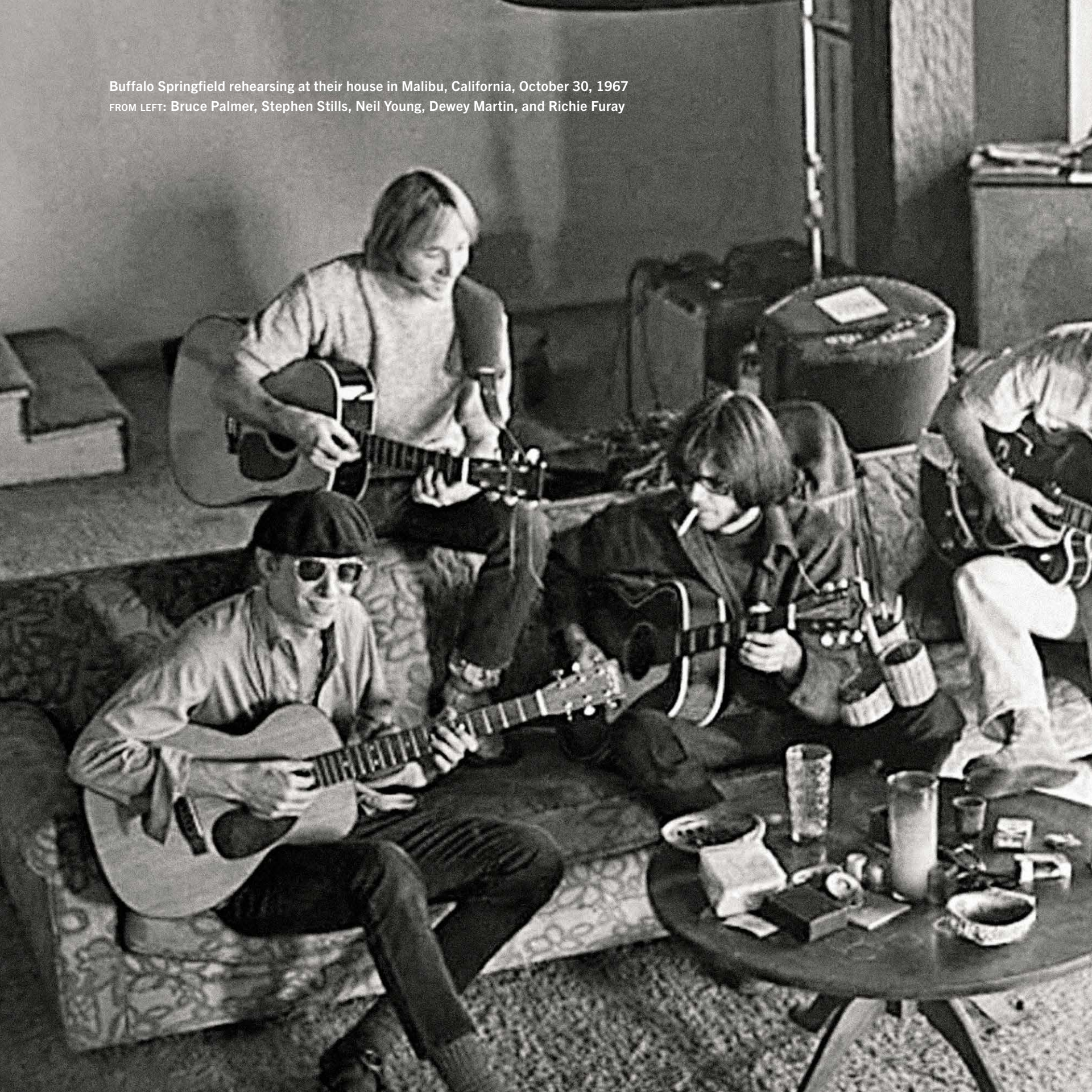
the Darlings, a stereotypical family of hillbilly musicians. Coincidentally, the Kentucky Colonels would also make two appearances on the *Griffith* show.

Blues music also drew in many younger musicians. Because the Ash Grove did not serve hard liquor and therefore had no age limit, two teenage brothers from Downey, Dave and Phil Alvin, spent many nights at the club, soaking up the sounds of everyone from T-Bone Walker to Big Joe Turner. Since they were too young to drive, their patient mother brought books and knitting and waited outside the club in her car, giving them a musical education that was put to good use later when they formed their own group, the Blasters. Similarly, Ry Cooder started playing at the Ash Grove at sixteen,

first backing singer Pamela Polland and, soon after, singer-songwriter Jackie DeShannon.

The Ash Grove employees and musicians formed a kind of family circle. In later years, whenever the club needed a benefit, particularly after one of several fire bombings (likely motivated by antagonism to Ed's liberal politics), many bands came back to play for free as a tribute to Ed, including the Byrds, the Flying Burrito Brothers, the Chambers Brothers, Spirit, and Canned Heat. The first generation of Ash Grove musicians, who were in their sixties and seventies then, are all gone now, but many of the younger ones, senior citizens themselves now, are still recording and performing, carrying the spirit of the Ash Grove into the future. Ω

Buffalo Springfield rehearsing at their house in Malibu, California, October 30, 1967
FROM LEFT: Bruce Palmer, Stephen Stills, Neil Young, Dewey Martin, and Richie Furay





CONTINUED FROM PAGE 35

The group soon revealed an affinity for country music with an authentic reading of Porter Wagoner's 1955 hit "Satisfied Mind," on their 1965 album *Turn! Turn! Turn!* It wasn't a big leap to country-rock the following year in "Mr. Spaceman," with its bouncy country beat and twangy guitar licks.

In England, the Beatles demonstrated their love for the sound of country music in their 1965 reworking of Buck Owens's 1963 hit "Act Naturally," built on a honky-tonk bounce familiar to two-stepping country fans, but powered by drummer and singer Ringo Starr's forceful rock backbeat. Other Beatles tracks circa 1964-66 revealed noticeable country leanings: "I Don't Want to Spoil the Party" (Rosanne Cash logged a hit country version in 1989), "What Goes On," "I'm Looking Through You," and "I've Just Seen a Face" (covered by the Dillards on their influential 1968 album, *Wheatstraw Suite*).

THE FIRST FLOWERING OF COUNTRY-ROCK

Other acts began to venture forth with this hybrid: Lovin' Spoonful's "Fishin' Blues" from their 1965 album, *Do You Believe in Magic?*, evidenced country and rock compatibility, although the exaggerated country framing made the track come across almost as a novelty record.



In L.A., however, country-rock was quickly becoming a viable musical force, emerging organically from a vibrant and diverse community established in and around Hollywood clubs such as the Ash Grove (a blues-folk-gospel mecca) and the rock-friendlier Troubadour and Whisky a Go-Go. And barely a dozen miles north, but a world away culturally, was the most important country honky-tonk in the West: the Palomino Club in North Hollywood.

The newly formed Buffalo Springfield flashed country credibility in a couple of Stephen Stills's songs from their 1966 debut album: "Go and Say Goodbye" and "Pay the Price." On their third album, *Last Time Around* (1968), Richie Furay's song "Kind Woman" prominently featured Rusty Young's pedal steel guitar, marking it as one of the first L.A. country-rock songs to do so.

Canadians Neil Young and Bruce Palmer and drummer Dewey Martin joined up with Stills and Furay following Stills and Furay's stint in New York with the Au Go Go Singers, another large-contingent folk ensemble à la the New Christy Minstrels. Furay also had crossed paths during that period with Gram Parsons, a Florida native who was then testing the New York folk scene before heading west to give L.A. a shot.

One of the Troubadour's regulars was Texas singer-songwriter Mike Nesmith, who had first recorded under the



TOP: Doug Dillard and Gene Clark of Dillard & Clark, 1968

The Stone Poneys at the Bitter End, New York, 1968

FROM LEFT: Shep Cooke, Linda Ronstadt, and John Keski

PHOTO BY CHARLIE GILLETT

OPPOSITE PAGE: The International Submarine Band, 1966

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Ian Dunlop, Mickey Gauvin, John Nuese, and Gram Parsons

PHOTO COURTESY OF IAN DUNLOP

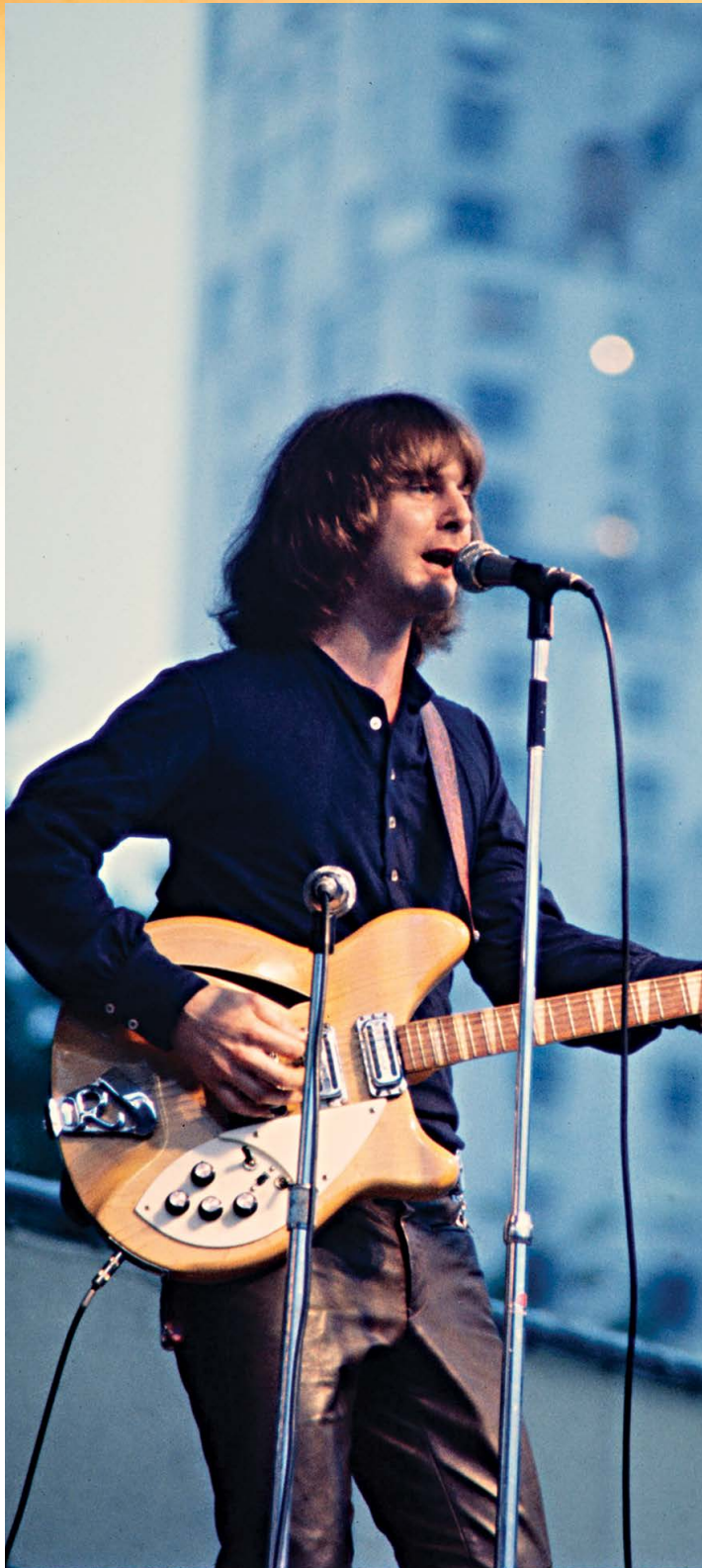


pseudonym Michael Blessing, with little impact. But after he was cast to act, and possibly sing, in NBC-TV's new sitcom about the hijinks of a fictional rock group called the Monkees, his songs regularly surfaced on their albums, alongside tunes from songwriting pros such as Tommy Boyce and Bobby Hart, Carole King and Gerry Goffin, and Neil Diamond.

Two of Nesmith's contributions to the group's 1966 debut album—"Papa Gene's Blues" and "Sweet Young Thing" (the latter written with Goffin and King)—revealed his country roots. Session musician James Burton's stinging, countrified Telecaster electric guitar work stood out on "Papa Gene's Blues," while a phalanx of raucous country fiddles defined "Sweet Young Thing."

One Nesmith song that producers of the Monkees nixed for the TV show came to Ronstadt's attention. She and the Stone Poneys released "Different Drum" in 1967 using a rocked-up arrangement by Capitol Records staff producer Nick Venet, then watched it soar to #13 on *Billboard's* Hot 100 chart. Thus, Ronstadt's mighty voice was introduced to the music world.

Even in the early going of an emerging style and sound, a couple of key differences from Nashville country music were apparent. Whereas the dominant recordings coming out of Music City in the mid-'60s were driven, as they long



had been, by individual singers, in L.A. the momentum tilted toward bands: the Byrds, Buffalo Springfield, Poco, and the Flying Burrito Brothers.

This reflected the dual influence on the Southern California community of the British Invasion and the underlying impact on so many musicians working in L.A. of the cornerstone bluegrass groups: Bill Monroe & the Blue Grass Boys, the Stanley Brothers, and Flatt & Scruggs. Such acts emphasized the interplay among multiple musicians rather than the star power of a single performer.

Many of those Southern California groups consisted of several accomplished singers and instrumentalists: in the Byrds, Roger McGuinn had been a session player in New York before coming to California; Hillman had earned respect as a mandolin player of great dexterity, a skill he translated promptly to electric bass; and David Crosby and Gene Clark brought distinctive voices and the ability to blend exquisitely with other singers.

Roger McGuinn performs with the Byrds at New York's Central Park, July 20, 1970.

PHOTO BY RAEANNE RUBENSTEIN

OPPOSITE PAGE: This stage costume—decorated with rhinestones and embroidered peacocks, orchids, and stars—was designed for the Monkees' Michael Nesmith by Nudie's Rodeo Tailors, 1967.

ARTIFACT COURTESY OF MICHAEL NESMITH

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The Byrds inside the Colosseum, Rome, Italy, May 8, 1968, on a European tour that included Doug Dillard on electric banjo
FROM LEFT: Dillard, Chris Hillman, Roger McGuinn, Kevin Kelley, and Gram Parsons. PHOTO COURTESY OF CHRIS HILLMAN

WHAT WAS THE FIRST COUNTRY-ROCK RECORD?

BY RANDY LEWIS

The term “country-rock” has long been associated with a music scene that had its genesis in the mid-1960s in Los Angeles and came into high relief through acts such as the Eagles, Linda Ronstadt, the Flying Burrito Brothers, and numerous others.

“Country-rock was nothing more than country song sensibilities with a rock rhythm section,” said Eagles founding member, banjo player, guitarist, and songwriter Bernie Leadon. When country-rock emerged in the mid-sixties, he said, “The volume of a country band was still—at that time in the fifties and sixties—moderate. But the rock groups got louder and louder.

“Fender made bigger and bigger amplifiers,” Leadon said. “The PA [public address] system couldn’t keep up with the volume of the guitar amps. So, then the PA systems grew, and the whole thing grew into this much,

much louder thing, and country-rock was nothing more than the kids violating the norms of country music in their elders. It’s like, ‘Let’s turn up. Come on, man.’”

By that measure, a bona fide country-rock recording wouldn’t necessarily need to feature steel guitar, banjo, fiddles, dobro, or harmonica.

So, who did get there first? Let’s work backward.

The Byrds’ *Sweetheart of the Rodeo* album, released in August 1968, is widely regarded as the Big Bang for country-rock. The Byrds, however, confessed they had no intention of concocting a new musical hybrid; they simply wanted to make a country record.

In any case, the Byrds weren’t operating in a vacuum. By 1968, numerous L.A. rock artists were exploring the

intersection of that music with country. Before joining the Byrds, Gram Parsons and the International Submarine Band pointed the way toward country-rock with their one and only album, released in March 1968. But it failed to make *Billboard's* album chart and had little impact until after Parsons's death in 1973, when fans began to seek out his earlier recordings.

The impact factor also mitigates balloting for other pre-*Sweetheart* releases, both from 1967, that balanced country and rock effectively. *Gene Clark with the Gosdin Brothers*, Clark's first solo effort after quitting the Byrds, and *Now Is the Time for Hearts and Flowers* from the band Hearts and Flowers (featuring Scottsville Squirrel Barkers founding member Larry Murray) were both innovative mixtures of country and rock but heard by few outside of Los Angeles.

Rick Nelson released a pair of albums in 1966 and 1967, well before he started the influential Stone Canyon Band, but both skewed heavily country, with little feel of rock in the grooves.

Earlier yet, however, other artists were testing the waters in individual tracks. Consider, for example, Linda Ronstadt & the Stone Poneys' hit version of "Different Drum" in 1967; two Stephen Stills songs on Buffalo Springfield's 1966 debut album, "Go and Say Goodbye"



Nudie's Rodeo Tailors designed this rhinestone-accented jacket, with embroidered submarines and torpedoes, for Gram Parsons of the International Submarine Band. Parsons later gave it to drummer Jon Corneal, his friend and bandmate.

ARTIFACT COURTESY OF JON CORNEAL

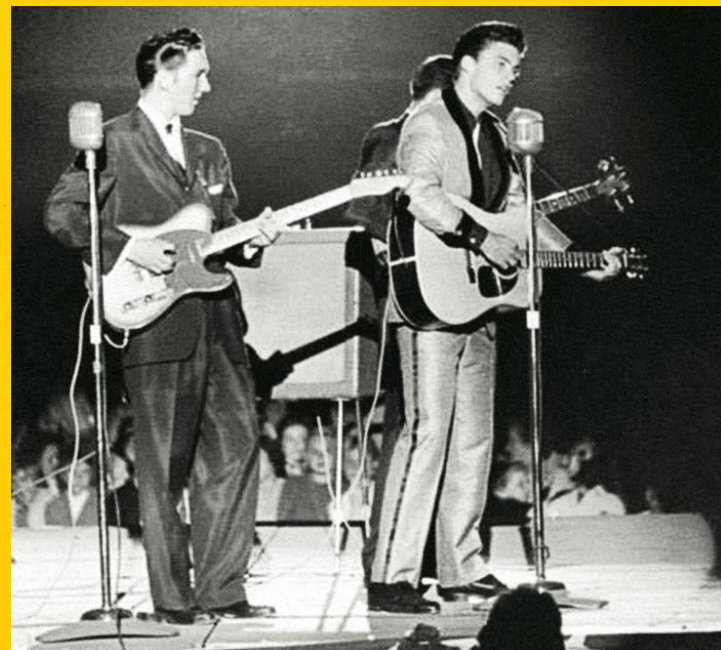
and “Pay the Price”; and the Byrds’ 1966 single “Mr. Spaceman.” All brought rock and country elements together, as did two Mike Nesmith songs, “Papa Gene’s Blues” and “Sweet Young Thing” (written with Gerry Goffin and Carole King), that appeared on the Monkees’ 1966 debut album.

Are we any closer to identifying the earliest record deserving to be called country-rock?

On a recent episode on Dwight Yoakam’s SiriusXM satellite radio show, *The Bakersfield Beat*, Yoakam told guest Chris Hillman that his song “Time Between,” from the Byrds’ 1967 album, *Younger Than Yesterday*, deserved the title.

Hillman said no, that the honor belonged to a record that had appeared six years earlier, one both musicians ultimately agreed included everything that would eventually constitute the L.A. country-rock sound: twangy Fender Telecaster guitar (courtesy of Louisiana transplant James Burton), a rollicking rhythm foundation from electric bassist Joe Osborne, and a signature percussive pulse provided by that most rock & roll of instruments: cowbell.

The first country-rock song according to Hillman and Yoakam? Rick Nelson’s 1961 hit “Hello Mary Lou.” Let the counter-arguments begin. Ω



James Burton and Rick Nelson, early 1960s

TOP: Hearts and Flowers, 1968

FROM LEFT: Larry Murray, Dave Dawson (seated), and Bernie Leadon



The Flying Burrito Brothers, 1969. FROM LEFT: Chris Ethridge, Gram Parsons, Chris Hillman, Sneaky Pete Kleinow, and Michael Clarke. PHOTO BY JIM MCCRARY

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 45

Of course, McGuinn's adoption of the Rickenbacker twelve-string electric guitar, which he had been inspired to pick up after seeing the Beatles using a Rickenbacker, became a hallmark of the group's sound throughout the Byrds' career.

Similarly, Neil Young and Stills became enthusiastic electric guitarists as teenage players and brought that energy and volume into even the country-skewed material in Buffalo Springfield's repertoire.

Additionally, L.A. country-rock had a wider thematic range than the mainstream country acts, whether it was the sci-fi whimsy of the Byrds' "Mr. Spaceman," the proto-feminism Ronstadt brought to "Different Drum," or the marriage of '60s counterculture fatalism and abiding religious faith captured in the Flying Burrito Brothers' "Wheels."

GRAM PARSONS AND SWEETHEART OF THE RODEO

In other corners, rock music was getting harder, heavier, and more psychedelized as the '60s unfurled. L.A. contributed too—Arthur Lee & Love, the Doors—but also remained a cauldron for rock's fascination with country.

This 1963 Martin 00-21 was used extensively by Gram Parsons and later acquired by Emmylou Harris.

ARTIFACT COURTESY OF EMMYLOU HARRIS





Squirrel Barkers co-founder Larry Murray teamed with Rick Cunha and Dave Dawson in Hearts and Flowers. Their 1967 album, *Now Is the Time for Hearts and Flowers*, influenced many with a full album's worth of countrified rock, though it had negligible commercial impact.

Exiting the Byrds, Gene Clark assembled his first solo album, *Gene Clark with the Gosdin Brothers*, another important full-on country-rock session that arrived in 1967. But it was overshadowed by the Byrds' *Younger*

Than Yesterday, released almost simultaneously. *Younger Than Yesterday* included "Time Between," the first song of import written by Hillman and considered a textbook example of L.A. country-rock.

At the time, however, McGuinn and Hillman were seeking new blood following the departures of Clark and Crosby. Hillman had recently met Parsons while both were in line at a bank, and they quickly bonded over shared musical passions. He invited Parsons to a Byrds rehearsal;

Parsons's undeniable charisma and vocal and songwriting talent moved the band to hire him as an adjunct player. Just months earlier, Parsons had recorded his first album fronting and writing songs for the International Submarine Band, notable for the presence of steel guitarist JayDee Maness, pianist Earl Ball, and bassist-songwriter Chris Ethridge, the latter also part of the first Burrito Brothers lineup.

But it was because of his new association with the Byrds that Parsons's star began to rise. He was the one (with strong support from Hillman) who catalyzed their move toward blending country and rock sensibilities on their watershed *Sweetheart of the Rodeo* album. Parsons was also the only bandmember who contributed new compositions, bringing two songs he had written to the 1968 album: "Hickory Wind" (written with Bob Buchanan) and "One Hundred Years from Now." Parsons's roots in the Deep South often surfaced in his laid-back drawl, which was distinct from most of the twang-free L.A. singers who were blending country with rock in the '60s.

Nudie's Rodeo Tailors designed this leather suit for guitarist Clarence White of the Byrds, c. 1969.

ARTIFACT COURTESY OF MARTY STUART

OPPOSITE PAGE: **Chris Hillman and Gram Parsons, Topanga Canyon, California, 1969.** PHOTO BY JIM MCCRARY / COURTESY OF CHRIS HILLMAN



COSMIC COWBOY COUTURE



In late 1968, the Flying Burrito Brothers went to Nudie's Rodeo Tailors in North Hollywood to order extravagantly embroidered, rhinestone-embellished stage costumes, which they associated with authentic country music. Collaborating with Nudie Cohn's head designer, Manuel Cuevas, each musician selected colors, fabric, and embroidery to reflect his personal style and taste.



For the cover of their 1969 debut album, *The Gilded Palace of Sin*, A&M Records art director Tom Wilkes took the Flying Burrito Brothers and several models to Joshua Tree National Park, where the band posed in their Nudie suits for photographer Barry Feinstein. Featured here are three of the four suits from the album cover. The whereabouts of Chris Ethridge's white suit with embroidered roses are unknown.

“Nobody before Gram Parsons went into country bars with suits with marijuana on them and long hair and rhinestone belts.” — JD Souther



FROM LEFT: Steel guitarist Sneaky Pete Kleinow's black velvet suit features embroidered dinosaurs on the front and back. Gram Parsons's suit has embroidered marijuana leaves, opium poppies, pills, cartoonish pinup girls, hellfire, and a shining cross. Chris Hillman's blue velvet suit is embellished with peacocks, seahorses, the Greek god Poseidon, and the face of an Aztec-style sun.

Artifacts courtesy of the Autry Museum of Western Heritage, Manuel Cuevas, Melanie Wells, Anita Kleinow, and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum



FROM LEFT: Sneaky Pete Kleinow, Gram Parsons, Chris Ethridge, and Chris Hillman

PHOTO BY: JIM MCCRARY

It's widely lauded as the inception of country-rock, even though albums from Clark and Hearts and Flowers preceded it. Yet *Sweetheart of the Rodeo* didn't catch fire with the public either, peaking at #77 on *Billboard*'s pop album chart.

Still, country-rock continued to proliferate as groups reconfigured or disbanded. From the ashes of Buffalo Springfield, which imploded after barely eighteen months, came Poco (featuring Furay and Jim Messina), Crosby, Stills & Nash (and, occasionally, Young), and Neil Young as a solo act. The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, which formed in 1966 and briefly included Jackson Browne before he went solo, reached #45 in *Billboard* with the first single, "Buy for Me the Rain," from their self-titled 1967 debut album.

Ronstadt & the Stone Poneys released three albums before disbanding. She briefly drafted the Corvettes, which included Bernie Leadon, the Dirt Band's Jeff Hanna, future Kaleidoscope front man Chris Darrow, bassist John London, and drummer John Ware.

Ronstadt subsequently assembled another group with players from L.A.'s Longbranch/Pennywhistle, Texas rock band Shiloh, Poco, and Rick Nelson's Stone Canyon Band, only to then set her stellar new conglomeration free to pursue music of their own as the Eagles.

Richie Furay used this 1959 Gibson ES-355, with custom white finish, with Poco, the Souther-Hillman-Furay Band, and as a solo artist.

ARTIFACT COURTESY
OF RICHIE FURAY





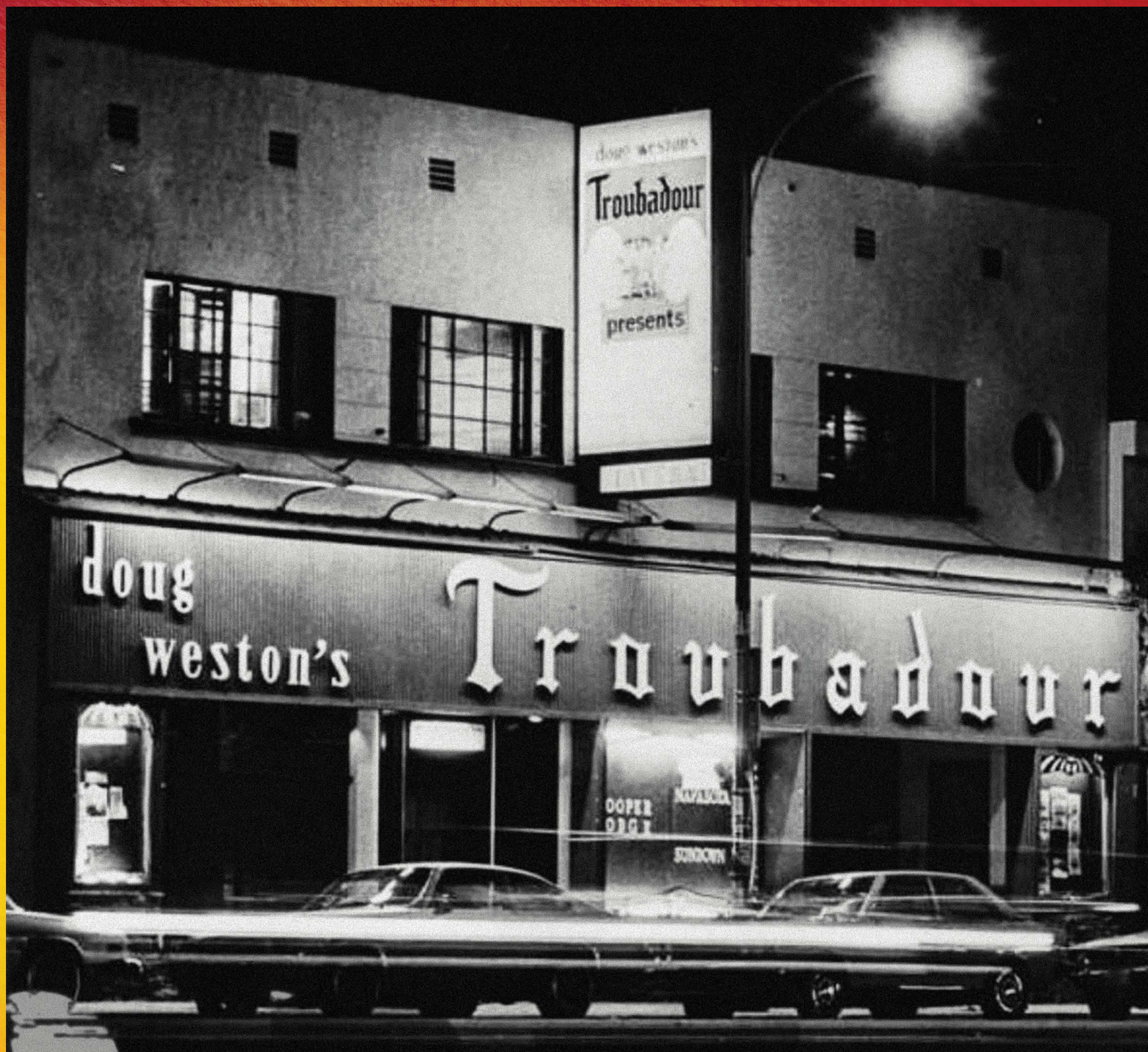
A key development in the continuing evolution of country-rock by 1968 was the addition of steel guitar as a full-time component in the Flying Burrito Brothers and Poco. Taking their cues both from Maness's role in the International Submarine Band and the central part Maness and Nashville steel ace Lloyd Green played in the Byrds' *Sweetheart of the Rodeo*, the Burrito Brothers brought in steel player Sneaky Pete Kleinow, and Poco drafted Colorado steel guitarist Rusty Young into their original lineups, cementing their kinship to traditional country while still relying on the rhythmic drive of electric bass and drums and prominent roles for electric guitars.

Decorated with rhinestones, leather fringe, and embroidered motifs inspired by Native American art, this stage costume was designed for Poco's Richie Furay by Nudie's Rodeo Tailors, c. 1969.

ARTIFACT COURTESY OF RICHIE FURAY

TOP: Poco at the Newport Pop Festival at Devonshire Downs racetrack, Northridge, California, June 22, 1969. From left: Rusty Young, Richie Furay, and Jim Messina. PHOTO COURTESY OF RICHIE FURAY

CONTINUED ON PAGE 65



Doug Weston's Troubadour,
9081 Santa Monica Boulevard

PHOTO BY JOEY TRANCHINA



WHERE THE ACTION WAS: THE TROUBADOUR

BY JAMES AUSTIN

"I liked the Ash Grove because the artists were very traditional.

I liked the Troubadour because they had both traditional music and pop music, plus comedy acts. They had a bar in the front, so you had to walk through the room where the stage was in order to get to the bathrooms in the back. That way you got to see part of the show, and everyone that played there for free. We all got to see each other's work that way. Managers and record label executives were there every night looking for talent."

—Linda Ronstadt, May 2022

"The Troubadour was the launch pad to stardom for the Byrds, the Flying Burrito Brothers, Elton John, Joni Mitchell, Jackson Browne, the Eagles, and many more. The open mike Hoot-Nights were classic and an opportunity to take that first step. Grand memories indeed!"

—Chris Hillman, April 2022

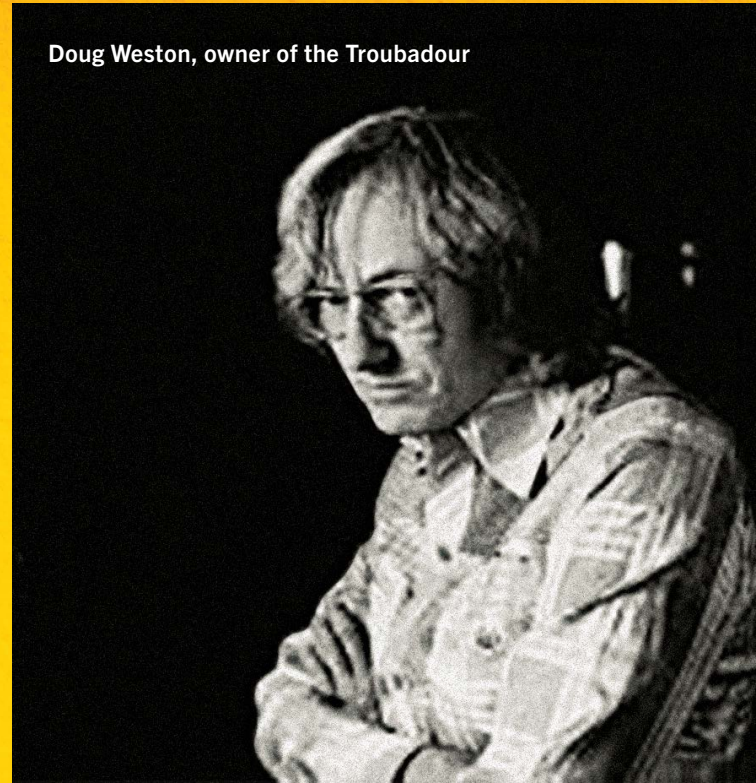
Linda Ronstadt and Chris Hillman are typical of the musicians who came of age in the 1960s in Southern California, shared ideas about country and rock music, collaborated, and went on to perform at a nightclub called the Troubadour, founded by Doug Weston. It was a crucial gathering place for musicians who would blend elements of country and rock music, forming potent new combinations.

“Doug Weston was arguably the godfather of the Southern California singer-songwriter movement in the late sixties and early seventies,” said *Los Angeles Times* music critic Robert Hilburn. “[He was] someone whose unshakable belief in the inspirational power of music made his club both a showcase and meeting hall for much of the best young talent of a generation.”

He was born Alexander Douglas Weston in New York in 1926—a time when “talking pictures” were on the horizon and the Model T was a common mode of transportation. Weston entered the Los Angeles nightclub scene with the ambition of putting Los Angeles on the music map, starting with a focus on folk music. He opened the first incarnation of the Troubadour, located on La Cienega Boulevard, in 1957, when folk music was not generally heard on pop radio.

The original Troubadour was a small, narrow club with a bar and a few tables in an opposite corner. In 1961,

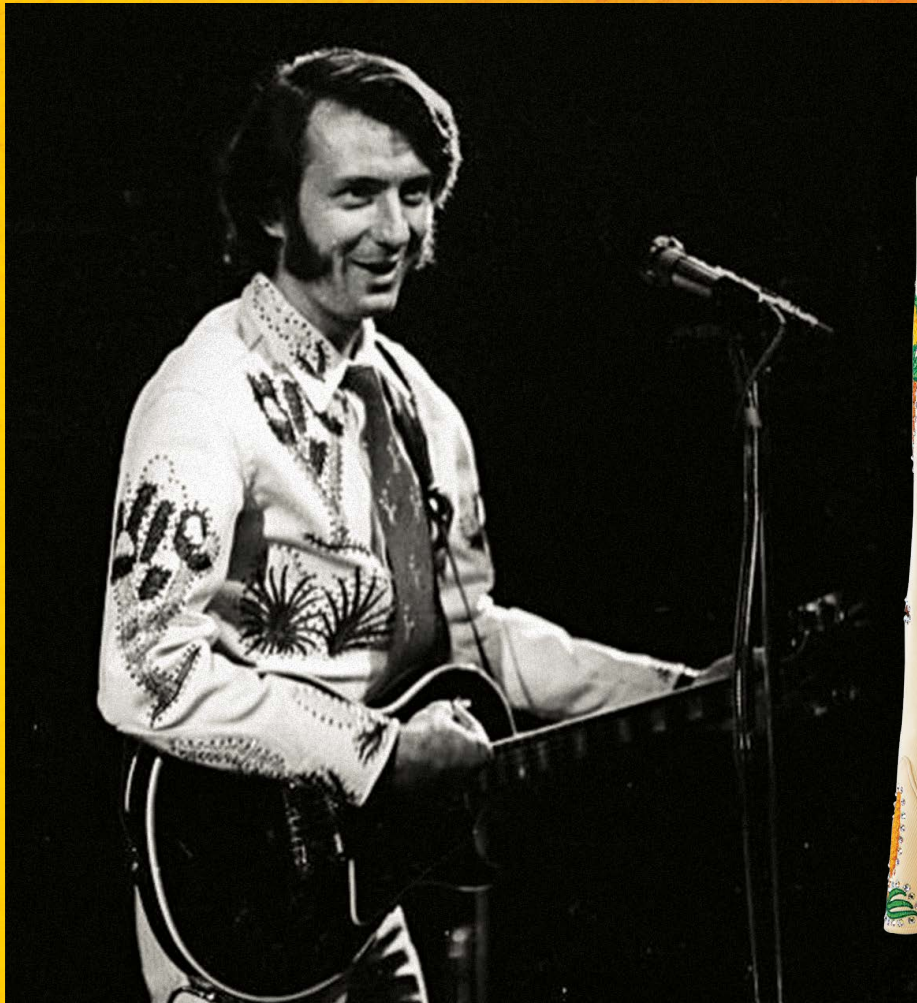
Doug Weston, owner of the Troubadour



Weston had earned enough money to move the club to 9081 Santa Monica Boulevard. At the new location, which would become permanent, the business sign ran the entire length of the venue and read: Doug Weston's Troubadour. Nestled close to the Hollywood Hills and the Sunset Strip, it was accessible to many and was *the* place to hang out.

When he was asked who played his club, Weston stated, “We won’t book someone just because he will draw a crowd. We have to believe he has something to say.”

By “he,” Weston also meant women, a mixture of ethnicities, and bands. The acts who played the Troubadour



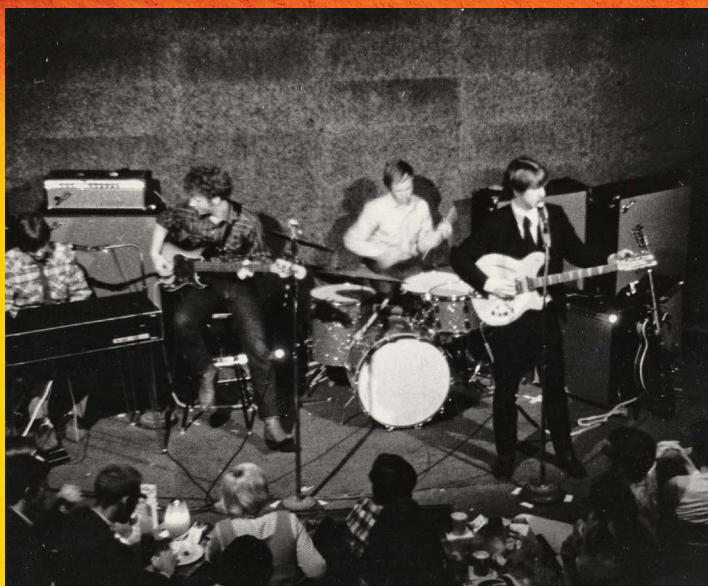
were, as Weston put it, “like a hall of fame”: Bo Diddley, Lenny Bruce (arrested at the club for saying “schmuck”), the Byrds, Waylon Jennings, Kris Kristofferson, Gordon Lightfoot, Roger Miller, Laura Nyro, Linda Ronstadt, and Nina Simone. Weston liked to think of the acts who played his club as “modern day troubadours.”

The success of Weston’s club did not occur in a vacuum. By 1968, underground FM rock stations KPPC and KMET

ran live ads for the Troubadour, blanketing Southern California. The new hybrid of country and rock gained traction at the Troubadour, with performers like Buffalo Springfield, the Flying Burrito Brothers (both Hillman and Parsons), Michael Nesmith, the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band,

Michael Nesmith at the Troubadour, 1970. Also pictured is the Nudie’s Rodeo Tailors shirt he wore that night. The shirt is embellished with rhinestones and embroidered cacti.

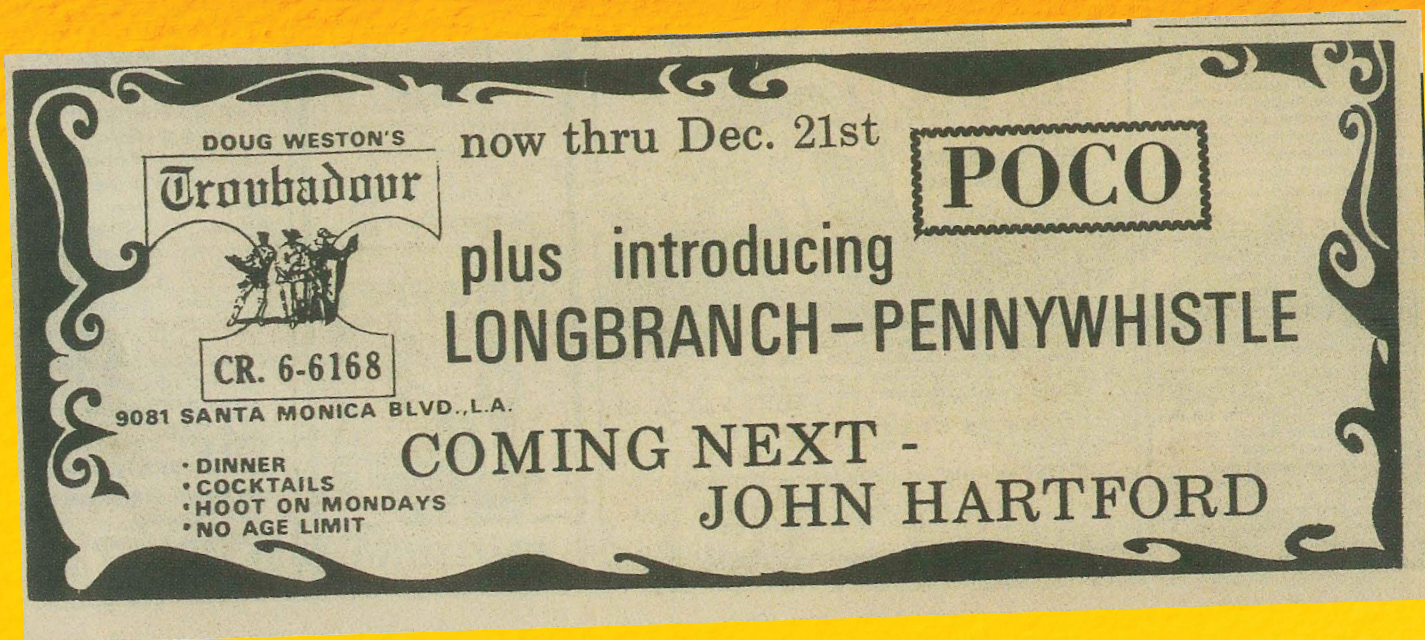
PHOTO BY HENRY DILTZ / ARTIFACT COURTESY OF MICHAEL NESMITH



and, eventually, the Eagles taking flight. The club helped launch an exciting new subgenre with country twang, steel guitars, harmonies, and a distinctive backbeat. Blissed-out hippies borrowed elements of the stripped-down sound of Bakersfield country and fused it with a rock panache. The country-rock genre grew and became profitable because of the Troubadour—a worldwide beacon for the new sounds.

Larry Murray, singer and guitarist for the country-rock group Hearts and Flowers, described Weston as a charismatic entrepreneur. “He loved to talk with musicians. He was a guy who could sniff out talent in a variety of genres,” said Murray. Murray should know, as he convinced Weston to let him organize and manage the Monday open-mike hootenanny (aka “Hoot Night”) in the early 1960s. It gave the club a feeling of community for musicians and patrons. “The Troubadour was a place where everyone went to hang out and get noticed,” recalled Ronstadt. “If you wanted to make yourself known, you’d go to the open-mike.”

Sadly, Weston grew frustrated with the music business. Robert Hilburn told me that “Doug became tormented by the fact that everyone—the musicians and record companies—was making so much more money than he was.” Weston also became increasingly involved with drugs, which affected his management of the club.



“Sad because Doug was such an invaluable part of the rich L.A. music scene,” said Hilburn.

Weston tried to update the musical menu over time, booking punk bands and power-pop groups, but the central role the Troubadour played in the city’s musical subculture slipped away. “The Sad Café,” from the Eagles’ album *The Long Run*, pays homage to the Troubadour. Written by JD Souther and members of the Eagles, the lyrics describe the club’s heyday (“it seemed like a holy place, protected by amazing grace”).

The Troubadour remains a monument to a special era in music and has showcased some of the great acts from all over the world. I saw Elton John prove that on August 25, 1970, playing a six-night electrifying engagement

that launched his career and solidified the legacy of the venue. Doug Weston died of pneumonia on February 14, 1999. Through the Troubadour, he made an impact. His vision for a community venue became a melting pot and in turn helped nurture the country-rock fusions that continue to entertain and inspire today. Ω

TOP: Managed by Doug Weston, Glenn Frey and JD Souther’s duo, Longbranch/Pennywhistle, opened for Poco at the Troubadour in December 1968.

OPPOSITE PAGE, FROM TOP: The Byrds at the Troubadour, spring 1968
FROM LEFT: Gram Parsons, Chris Hillman, Kevin Kelley, and Roger McGuinn

PHOTO COURTESY OF CHRIS HILLMAN

Linda Ronstadt at the Troubadour, 1971

PHOTO BY SHERRY RAYNE BARNETT

Elton John at the Troubadour, August 1970

PHOTO BY ED CARAEFF





CONTINUED FROM PAGE 57

Clearly, country-rock was coming together as a bona fide pop music genre, though it still showed up only sporadically on the charts as the 1960s drew to a close. That was about to change dramatically.

THE SEVENTIES: L.A. SOUND EXPLOSION

At the dawn of a new decade, years of civil and political unrest, the divisiveness of the Vietnam War, social tensions that had erupted during the Civil Rights era, and the blossoming sexual revolution that all played out dramatically in the '60s left millions of Americans emotionally reeling.

The biggest hits of 1970 played to societal exhaustion, offering emotional comfort and, often, spiritual solace. The likes of Simon & Garfunkel's "Bridge Over Troubled Water," the Beatles' "Let It Be," the Jackson 5's "I'll Be There," and George Harrison's "My Sweet Lord" reined in the sonic volume and calmed the frenetic energy from the *music in extremis* heights reached in the age of Woodstock, Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, and the Doors.

Michael Nesmith & the First National Band, c.1970

FROM LEFT: John London, Red Rhodes, Nesmith, and John Ware

Michael Nesmith used this Gibson J-200 with the First National Band.

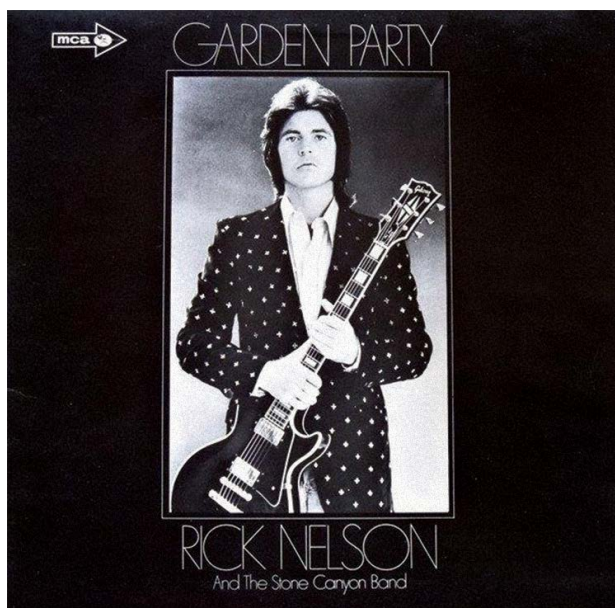
ARTIFACT COURTESY OF MICHAEL NESMITH

CAPO 2nd
on G#-5/17/24

(The "Garden Party")

1. I went to a garden party, to reminisce with
my old friends, a chance to share old memories,
we play our songs again.
2. When I got to the garden party, they all knew
my name, but no one recognized me, everything
had changed.
(But it's alright now, I loved my dream
well, but you can't please everyone,
so you gotta please yourself.)
3. People came from miles around, everyone was there,
who brought John Lennon, that was magic in the
air.
4. Over in the corner, much to my surprise
Mr. Fugke hid in a place alone, wearing
his disguise. (But it's alright now, -)
5. We played them all the old songs, I thought
that's why they came, but no one heard the
music, I didn't look the same.
6. I said hello to Mary Lou, before we played
the song, she belongs to me.
Then I sang a song about a Hardy-Lark, as
the band filled up, with fate. (But it's alright now, -)
7. Lennon opened up a closet door, an out stepped
Johnny Depp, playing guitar, just like a song on
a wall, an "Larkin" like he should.
Now if you gotta play at garden parties, I
want you a little luck, but if someone loves all
I sang, I'd rather drive a truck. (But it's alright now, -)

(Col Perkins ending)





Rick Nelson and the Stone Canyon Band at the Troubadour, October 1969, recording the live album *Rick Nelson in Concert*
FROM LEFT: Randy Meisner, Nelson, Pat Shanahan (on drums), Allen Kemp, and Tom Brumley

OPPOSITE PAGE: Rick Nelson's handwritten lyrics to his 1972 hit, "Garden Party"

Rick Nelson used this 1969 Gibson Les Paul Custom while fronting the Stone Canyon Band. He is pictured with it on the cover of their 1972 album, *Garden Party*.

ARTIFACTS COURTESY OF GUNNAR AND MATTHEW NELSON

Millions found solace in the soothing music of Carole King, James Taylor, and others, much of it rooted in folk and country music. Softer sounds dovetailed with the merging of country and rock that had been incubating for years in Los Angeles and increasingly found its way onto radio airwaves and national sales charts.

Country-rock provided an appealing alternative to the amped-up rock of Led Zeppelin, Black Sabbath, Grand Funk Railroad, and Alice Cooper with music built on tradition yet alive with new lyrical sophistication and emotional expressivity.

Ronstadt continued exploring the connection between country and rock, old and new, in her eclectic 1970 album, *Silk Purse*, which included Hank Williams's "Lovesick Blues," Gene Clark and Bernie Leadon's "He Dark the Sun," and the album's Top Thirty single, Gary White's "Long Long Time."

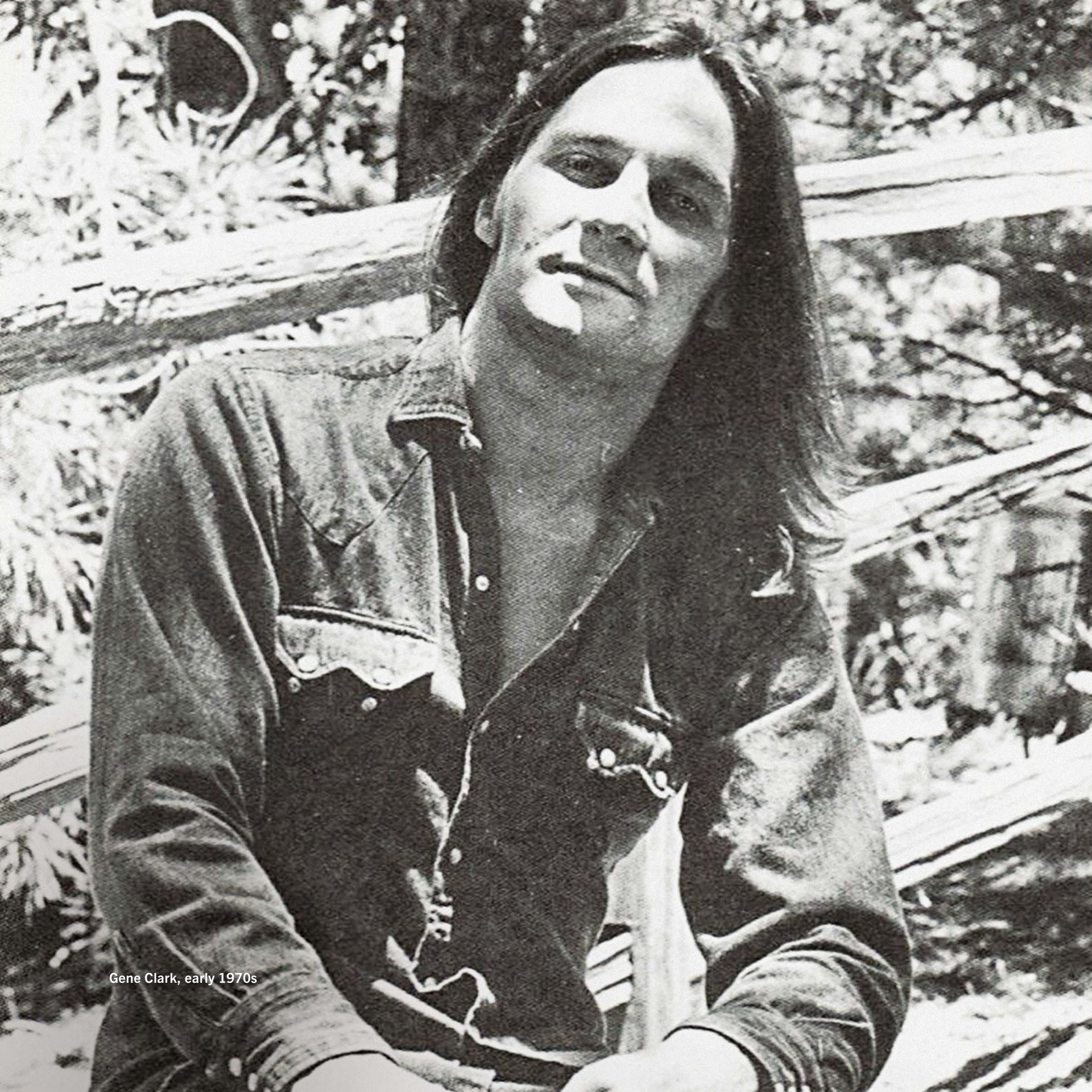
Ronstadt's voice could break with the best female singers Nashville had to offer, but with her immersion in Mexican music, opera, and pop standards growing up, she never developed the kind of twang that would make listeners mistake hers for a traditional country voice. Instead, her dual hallmarks were sheer power and an innate capacity for great nuance in sculpting the songs she chose.

Another secret weapon Ronstadt brought to bear, both early on and throughout her career, was her ability to recognize great material. Singers who were not also songwriters often were discounted as mere instruments of producers or record company executives. But Peter Asher, the singer, songwriter, producer, and talent manager who oversaw her breakthrough 1974 album, *Heart Like a Wheel*, is one of many who happily testify to the strong hand she always exerted, whether choosing and arranging songs in the recording studio or for public performances.

Almost simultaneously as Ronstadt was coming into her own as a solo act, Nesmith quit the Monkees and released his first solo album: *Magnetic South*, a full-on country-rock adventure generously showcasing innovative steel guitarist Red Rhodes, along with ex-Corvettes London and Ware in Nesmith's First National Band.

His first single, "Joanne," made the pop Top Thirty, but the album peaked at only #143 in *Billboard*. Too country for rock radio, and too rock for country radio, many said. *Rolling Stone* later deemed it "the greatest music you never heard."

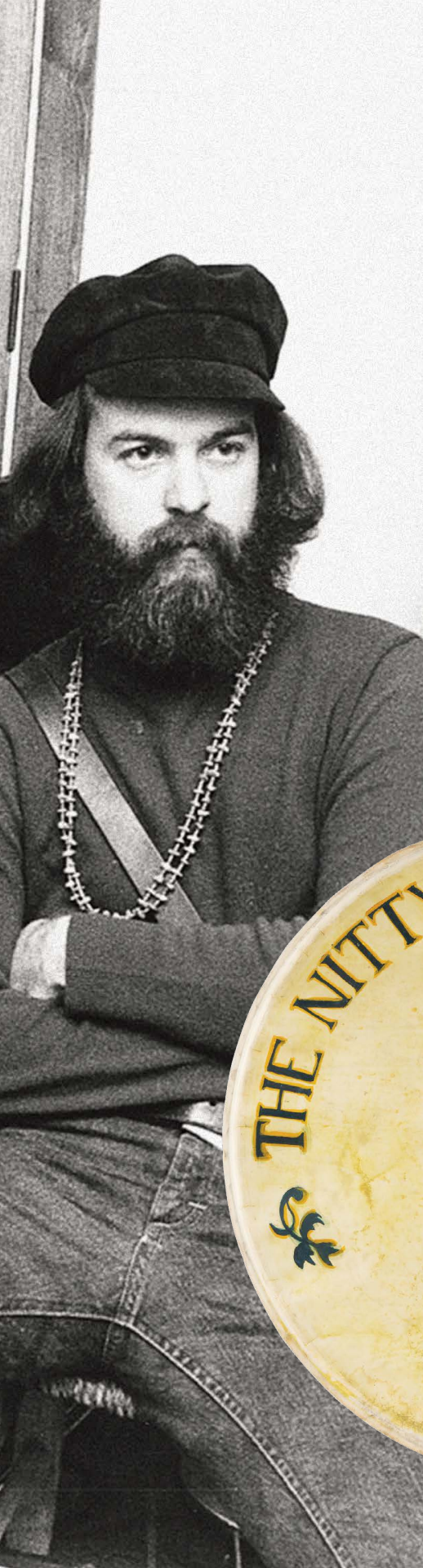
It was also in 1970 that the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band released *Uncle Charlie and His Dog Teddy*, an album that yielded the group's first Top Ten single: Jerry Jeff Walker's poignant waltz, "Mr. Bojangles." After a Shreveport,



Gene Clark, early 1970s



Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, c. 1971. FROM LEFT: Jimmie Fadden,
Jeff Hanna, Jimmy Ibbotson, John McEuen, and Les Thompson
PHOTO BY CHRIS WALTER



TOP LEFT: The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band performed at the Paradox, a coffeehouse in Orange, California, May 1966. Brief member Jackson Browne appears in the photo.

ARTIFACT COURTESY OF DAVID ANDERSEN

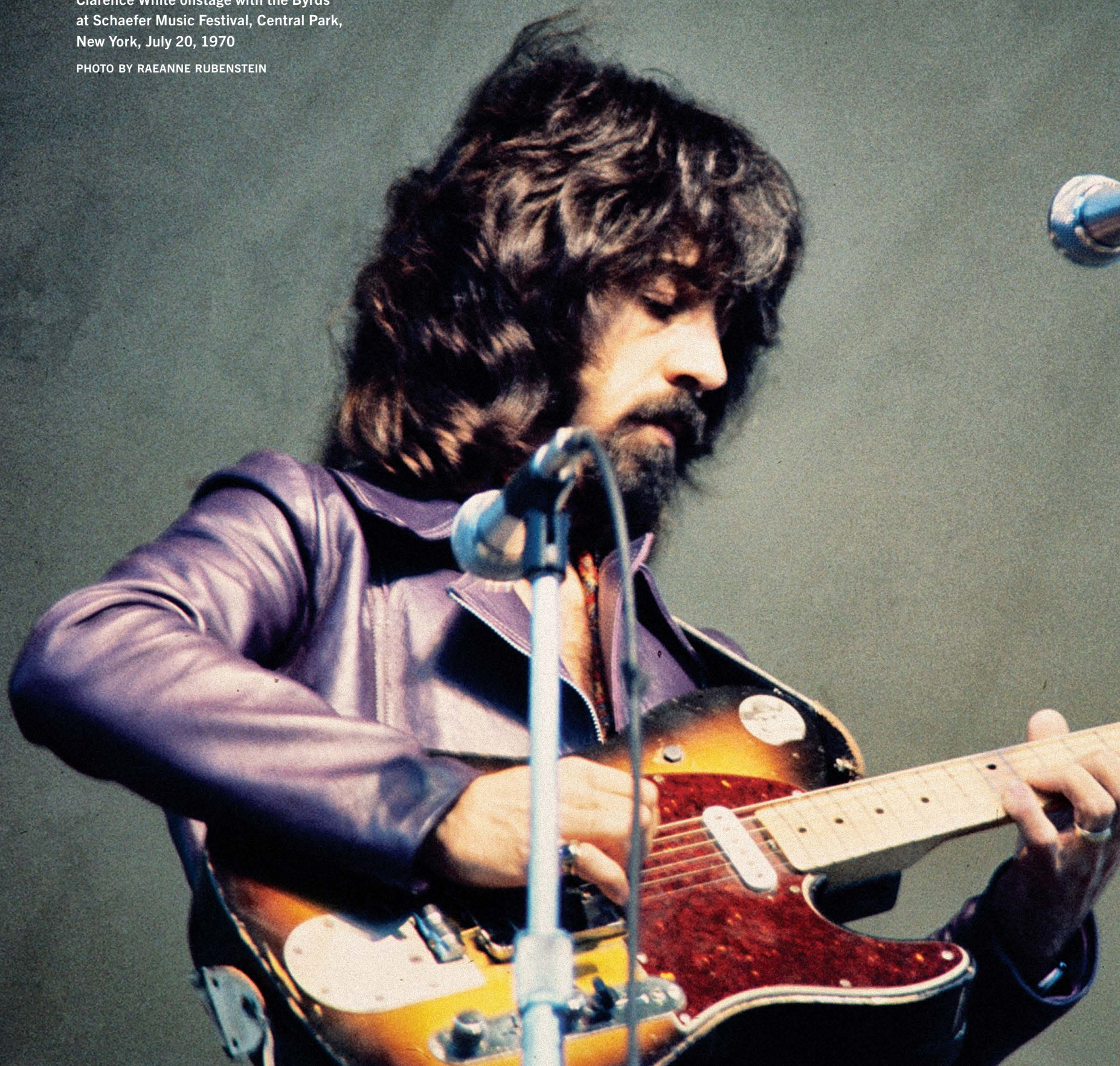
ABOVE: John McEuen played this 1967 Gibson Style 800 five-string banjo on the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band's landmark 1972 album, *Will the Circle Be Unbroken*.

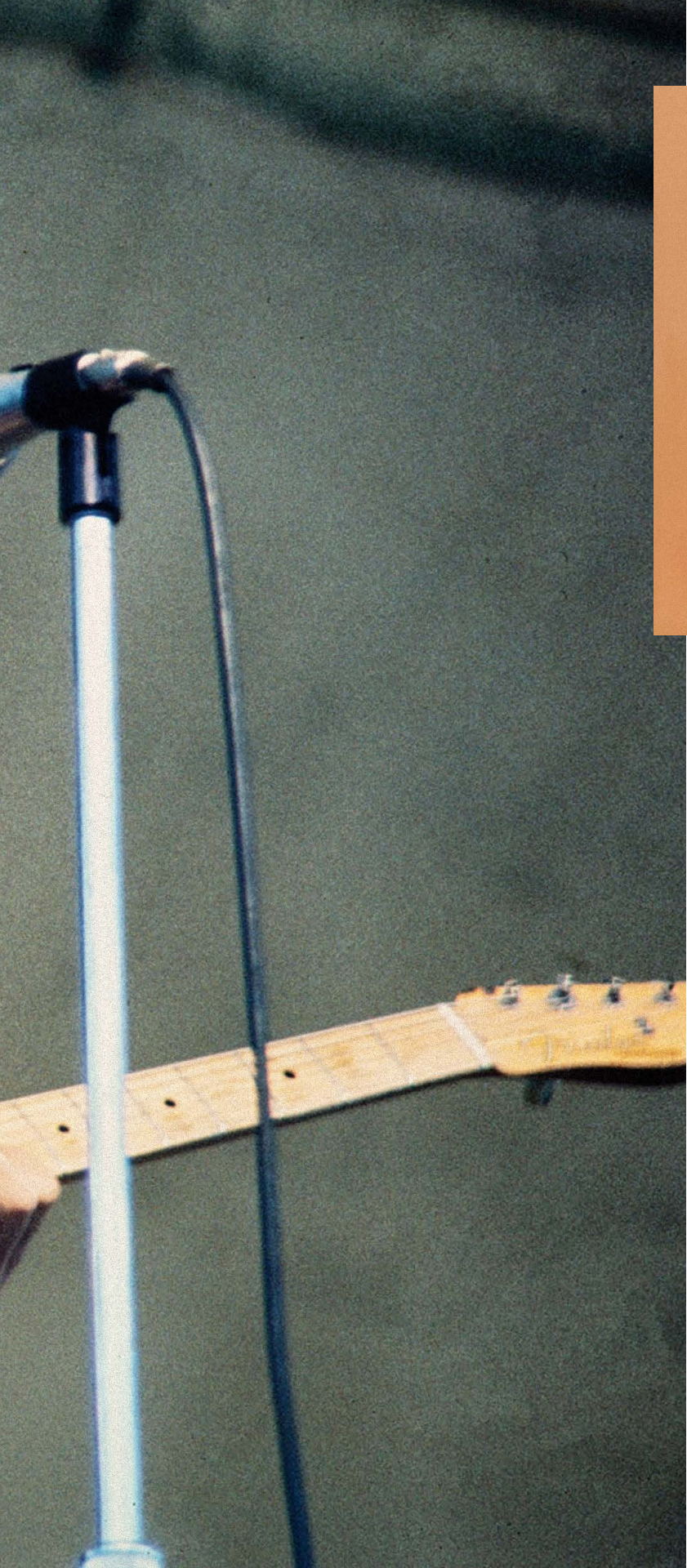
ARTIFACT COURTESY OF JOHN MCEUEN
AND THE ROCK AND ROLL HALL OF FAME AND MUSEUM

LEFT: Hand-painted bass drumhead, c.1970

Clarence White onstage with the Byrds
at Schaefer Music Festival, Central Park,
New York, July 20, 1970

PHOTO BY RAEANNE RUBENSTEIN





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GENE PARSONS RICK ROBERTS BYRON BERLINE
CHRIS ETHERIDGE KEN WIRTZ ROGER BUSH ALLEN MUNDE

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TRACY NELSON / Mother Earth ERIC WEISBERG / Deliverance NEW GRASS REVIVAL	TRACY NELSON / Mother Earth CHARLES RIVER VALLEY BOYS CHRIS SMITHER TOWNES VAN ZANDT NORMAN BLAKE / Grant Boatright NEW ENGLAND BLUE GRASS BOYS RUSS KIRKPATRICK N-R-B-Q	TRACY NELSON / Mother Earth JONATHAN EDWARDS N-R-B-Q NORMAN BLAKE / Grant Boatright ORPHAN HOOKFOOT LIZ MEYER BRIAN BOWERS

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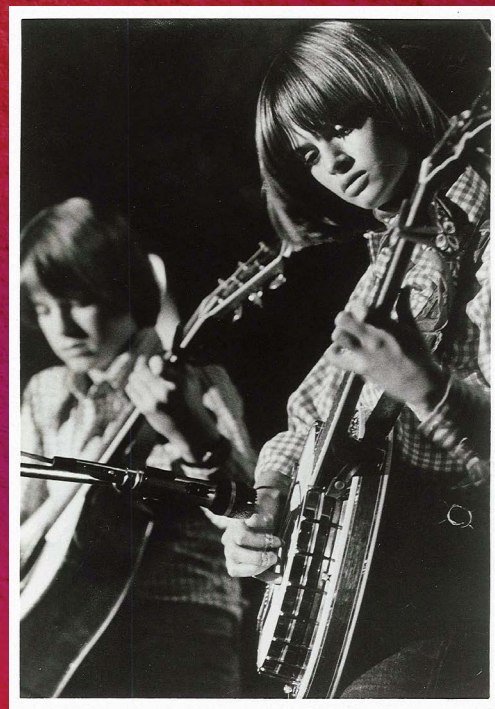
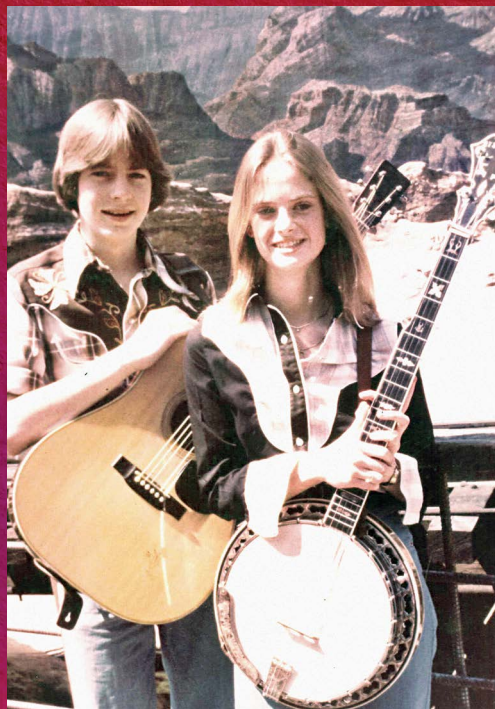
Louisiana, station started playing the track, a record company rep called to tell the band the label wanted to issue it as a single.

"We were like, 'Oh, we love "Mr. Bojangles," but it's almost four minutes long,'" Jeff Hanna remembered recently. "And it's a waltz about an old guy and a dog. They'll never play it on Top Forty radio.' And of course, us having our elbow on the pulse of America, we were totally wrong. And thank goodness. . . . It also became a pivotal part of the story of how *Will the Circle Be Unbroken* came to be."

In June 1973, Gram Parsons, Emmylou Harris, the New Kentucky Colonels, and Country Gazette headlined a weekend of concerts at Carr's Beach, Annapolis, Maryland. They shared a backing band that included Clarence White, Sneaky Pete Kleinow, and Chris Ethridge. These were among the final performances by White, who was killed by a drunk driver on July 15, 1973, and Parsons, who died in September.

ARTIFACT COURTESY OF STEVE FISHELL

CONTINUED ON PAGE 79



SPLENDOR IN THE GRASS: AN INSIDER'S VIEW OF WEST COAST BLUEGRASS

BY ALISON BROWN

I came of age in the Southern California bluegrass scene of the mid-1970s, some thirty years and 2,000 miles from the Ryman Auditorium stage, where bluegrass music first ignited in 1945. While bluegrass arose in the rural Southeast, the music found a completely different home, and personality, on the West Coast in the 1960s and 1970s. Although bluegrass was an anomaly in the surf culture of my hometown of La Jolla, just north of San

Diego, it was ubiquitous in the pizza palaces, folk clubs, and theme parks around Southern California.

None of the bluegrass musicians I learned from, or played with, were farmers, although some were descendants of Dust Bowl migrants who had made a new life in California a generation earlier. Others were migrants of a different kind—legendary players like fiddler Byron



Stuart Duncan, Steve Libbea, Vince Gill, and Alison Brown at Knott's Berry Farm, 1978

OPPOSITE PAGE, FROM LEFT: Alison Brown at a banjo contest. Santa Maria, California, 1976

Stuart Duncan and Alison Brown at Knott's Berry Farm, Buena Park, California, 1979

Stuart Duncan and Alison Brown at the Canadian National Banjo Championship, 1978

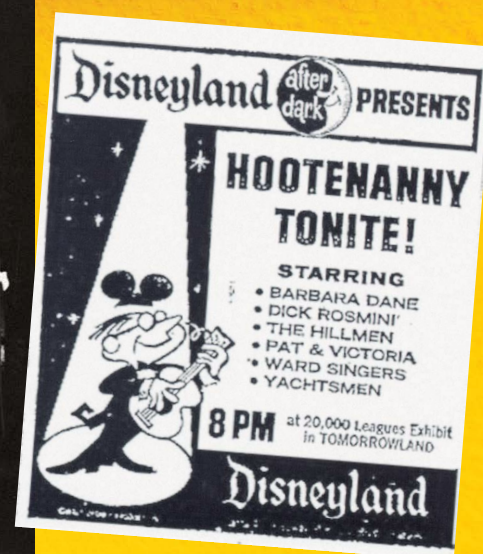
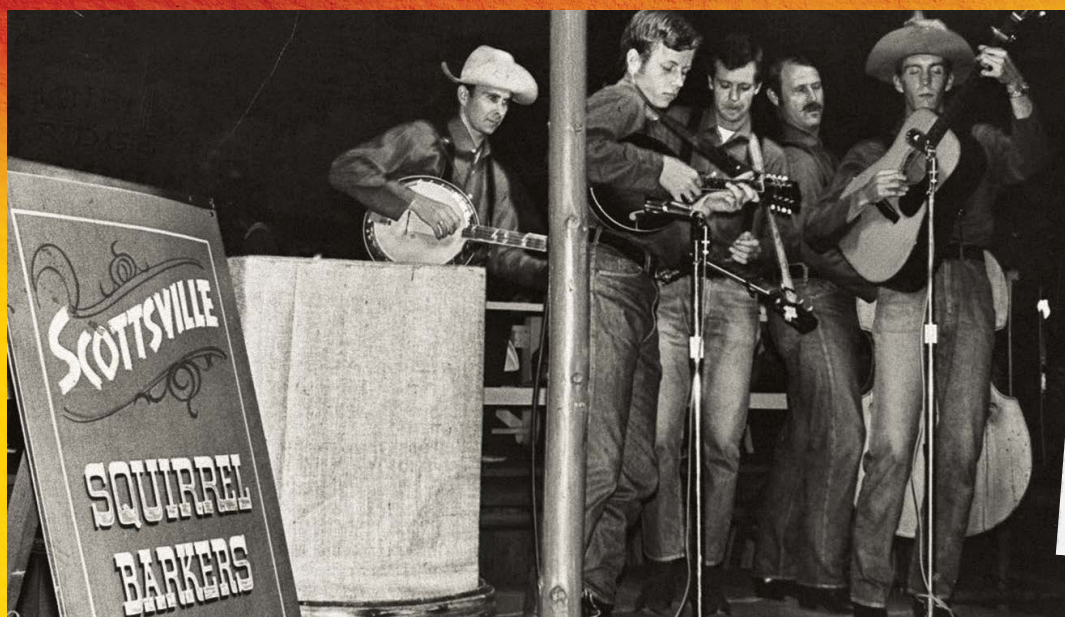
PHOTOS COURTESY OF ALISON BROWN

Berline and Vince Gill—who headed west for the musical opportunities afforded by the film industry and recording scene in Los Angeles. But mostly, the Southern California pickers I knew were white-collar, college-educated folks, who discovered bluegrass as a result of the “great folk scare” of the 1960s.

As they played it, bluegrass took on a new hue. The grit, the blues edge, and hard-driving groove that characterized the sound of the music’s founding fathers—to my mind, the musical expression of the hard times of their shared Depression-era youths—became more laid back and relaxed under California’s endlessly sunny skies. The repertoire expanded too, with grassed-up covers

of country-rock radio fare alongside the nostalgic “cabin” songs of the music’s creators. It wasn’t until I’d spent time in the South, with its tacitly acknowledged rules of what is and isn’t bluegrass, that I fully appreciated how musically liberal the West Coast scene was by comparison. That openness was to my benefit, too. As a girl playing the banjo, the most masculine bluegrass instrument of them all, I’m not sure I would have found the same measure of encouragement in southern Appalachia.

My first live experience with California bluegrass was in 1974. I was twelve years old, an aspiring banjo player and a recent arrival from New England. My parents took me to a monthly meeting of the San Diego Bluegrass Club,



which was, perhaps not surprisingly, held at a Shakey's Pizza Parlor. That night I watched ten-year-old Stuart Duncan burn down Paul Warren's fiddle solo on "Earl's Breakdown" (a Flatt & Scruggs classic), and I knew I'd found my people.

For the rest of the decade, Stuart and I played together at folk clubs around L.A., which had gained their reputations in the burgeoning folk scene a decade earlier. These were legendary rooms like the Troubadour, the Ice House, McCabe's, and the Palomino Club, where, because they served alcohol, we kids had to stand in the bathroom between sets. (California child labor laws were no-nonsense back then.) At shows and jams around L.A., we hung on every note played by masters like Byron Berline, Larry McNeely, and John Hickman.

One afternoon in 1978, on a lark, Stuart and I joined forces with Vince Gill and the Libbea Brothers and won the Knott's Berry Farm bluegrass band contest.

Coming up in Southern California, I followed a bluegrass path cut by West Coast trailblazers a generation ahead of me. In L.A., the Kentucky Colonels began reimagining the possibilities for bluegrass instrumentation in the sixties, with Clarence White building on Doc Watson's legacy and expanding the role of the acoustic guitar as

The Scottsville Squirrel Barkers at Disneyland, Anaheim, California, 1963. FROM LEFT: Kenny Wertz, Chris Hillman, Larry Murray, Ed Douglas, and Gary Carr

PHOTO COURTESY OF CHRIS HILLMAN

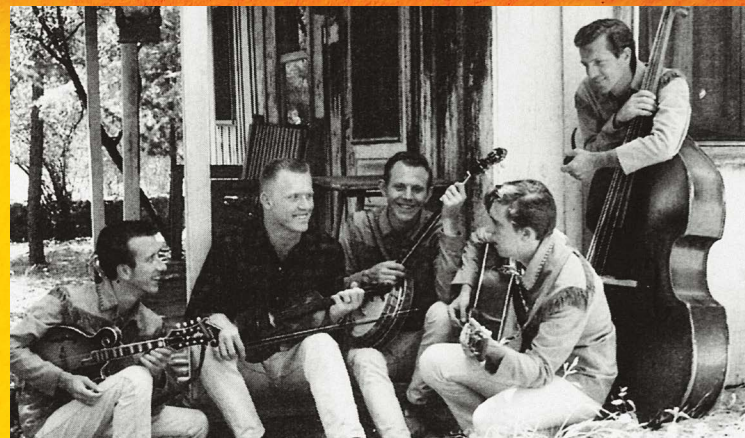
The Hillmen performed at Disneyland, c. 1964.

ARTIFACT COURTESY OF CHRIS HILLMAN

both a lead and rhythm instrument in a bluegrass setting. In the Bay Area in the early seventies, *Old & In the Way*, with the Grateful Dead's Jerry Garcia on banjo, was stretching out on vibey instrumental interludes that foreshadowed eighties jamgrass. In 1977, the David Grisman Quintet, based in San Francisco, released their debut album; with its intoxicating blend of swing, gypsy jazz, and bluegrass as well as occasional odd time-signatures and extended solos, the quintet obliterated any idea of musical limitations for traditional bluegrass instruments.

These musical mavericks helped open the door to a galaxy of new possibilities, and it was impossible for me not to fall under their sway. In the summer of 1978, Stuart's dad drove us back east on a weeks-long road trip to do the bluegrass festival circuit. Inspired by miles of repeated listening to a cassette of the Grisman Quintet's album, Stuart and I ventured to play "Nick's Noodle," a tune we had learned from Grisman collaborator and Seatrain's fiddler Richard Greene at a bluegrass festival in Hugo, Oklahoma. After our set, we were shocked and amused to be scolded by a festival goer for "mocking the music." The thought just hadn't occurred to us; that kind of instrumental experimentation was part and parcel of the bluegrass music we had been steeped in.

Eventually I found my way to Nashville, following behind some of my California bluegrass heroes and compadres,



The Dillards recorded the album *Pickin' and Fiddlin'* with Byron Berline in 1965. FROM LEFT: Dean Webb, Berline, Doug Dillard, Rodney Dillard, and Mitch Jayne

Byrone Berline and Doug Dillard at a bluegrass festival, 1973

including Roland White, Vince Gill, and my old pal Stuart Duncan. With our shared love for the music's roots, coupled with a drive to incorporate contemporary influences, I think that each of us brought part of the West Coast scene's legacy with us to Music City. As for me, I've never lost my appetite for pushing the musical envelope for the banjo and challenging the preconceived notions about an instrument that has struggled to shed its hillbilly image. For that, I'm indebted to my California bluegrass roots. Ω



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 73

Indeed, two years later the group headed to Nashville to collaborate with some of the most significant figures in country music history for what would become a career-defining triple album. West met South in the groundbreaking union between the long-haired California hippies and so many country tradition standard-bearers: Mother Maybelle Carter, Roy Acuff, Earl Scruggs, Doc Watson, and Merle Travis, among the highlights.

The country-rock sound was rapidly reaching beyond Southern California. It had appeared in 1969 in Dylan's *Nashville Skyline* album and the hit single "Lay Lady Lay." It was there in hits from John Fogerty's group Creedence Clearwater Revival ("Lookin' Out My Back Door" even name-checked Buck Owens). It was felt in Top Ten pop singles such as Janis Joplin's rendition of Kris Kristofferson's "Me and Bobby McGee," John Denver's "Take Me Home, Country Roads" and "Rocky Mountain High," America's Neil Young-esque "A Horse with No Name," and Danny O'Keefe's "Good Time Charlie's Got the Blues."

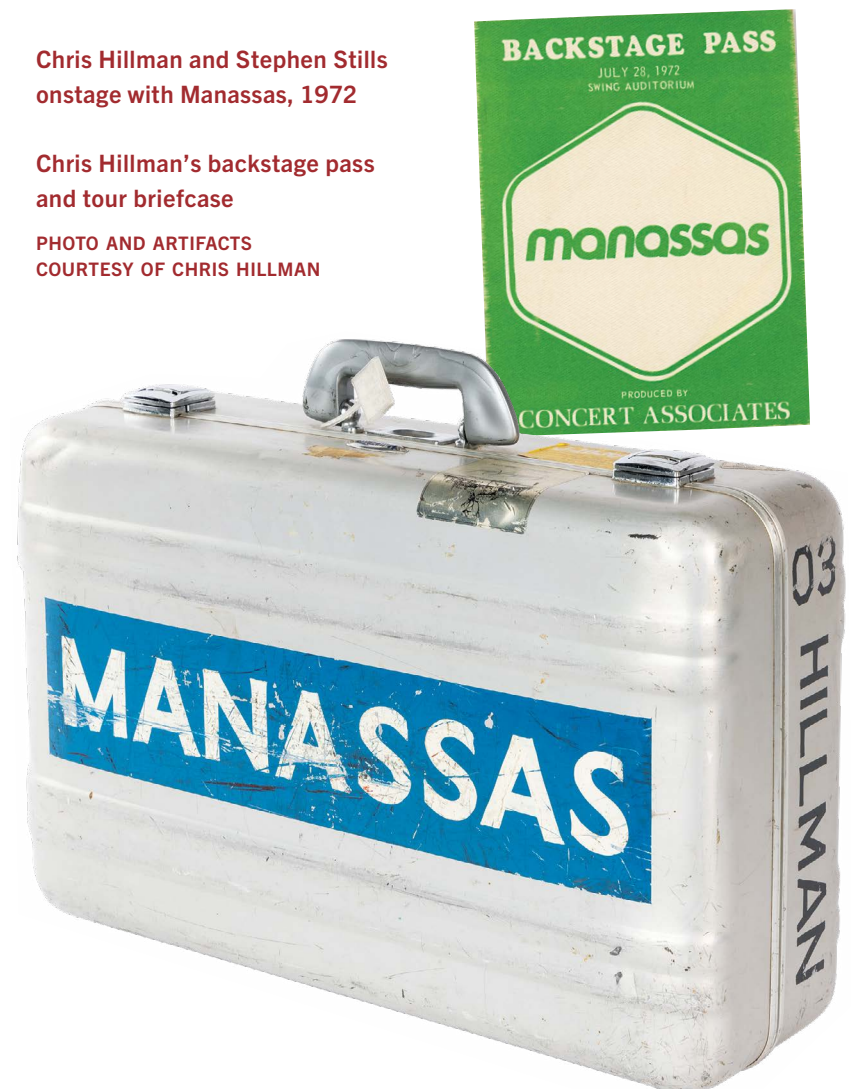
None of this was lost on Johnny Cash, who in addition to being one of the titans of country music, also was a connoisseur of great songs, singers, and songwriters. When ABC gave him his own TV show in 1969, Cash insisted on choosing his own guests, and landed no less than Bob Dylan for the premiere episode.

He also drew on some of the brightest lights of the L.A. music community, inviting Linda Ronstadt, James Taylor, Joni Mitchell, and Neil Young to Nashville for guest spots on the show that took place in the historic Ryman Auditorium. The experience was especially pivotal for Young, who decided to book some recording sessions while he was in the country capital, as Dylan had done in recent years for his *Blonde on Blonde*, *John Wesley Harding*, and *Nashville Skyline* albums.

**Chris Hillman and Stephen Stills
onstage with Manassas, 1972**

**Chris Hillman's backstage pass
and tour briefcase**

**PHOTO AND ARTIFACTS
COURTESY OF CHRIS HILLMAN**





Detail of the 1968 Gibson Dove guitar JD Souther bought at his father's music store in Amarillo, Texas, and used when performing with Glenn Frey as Longbranch/Pennywhistle

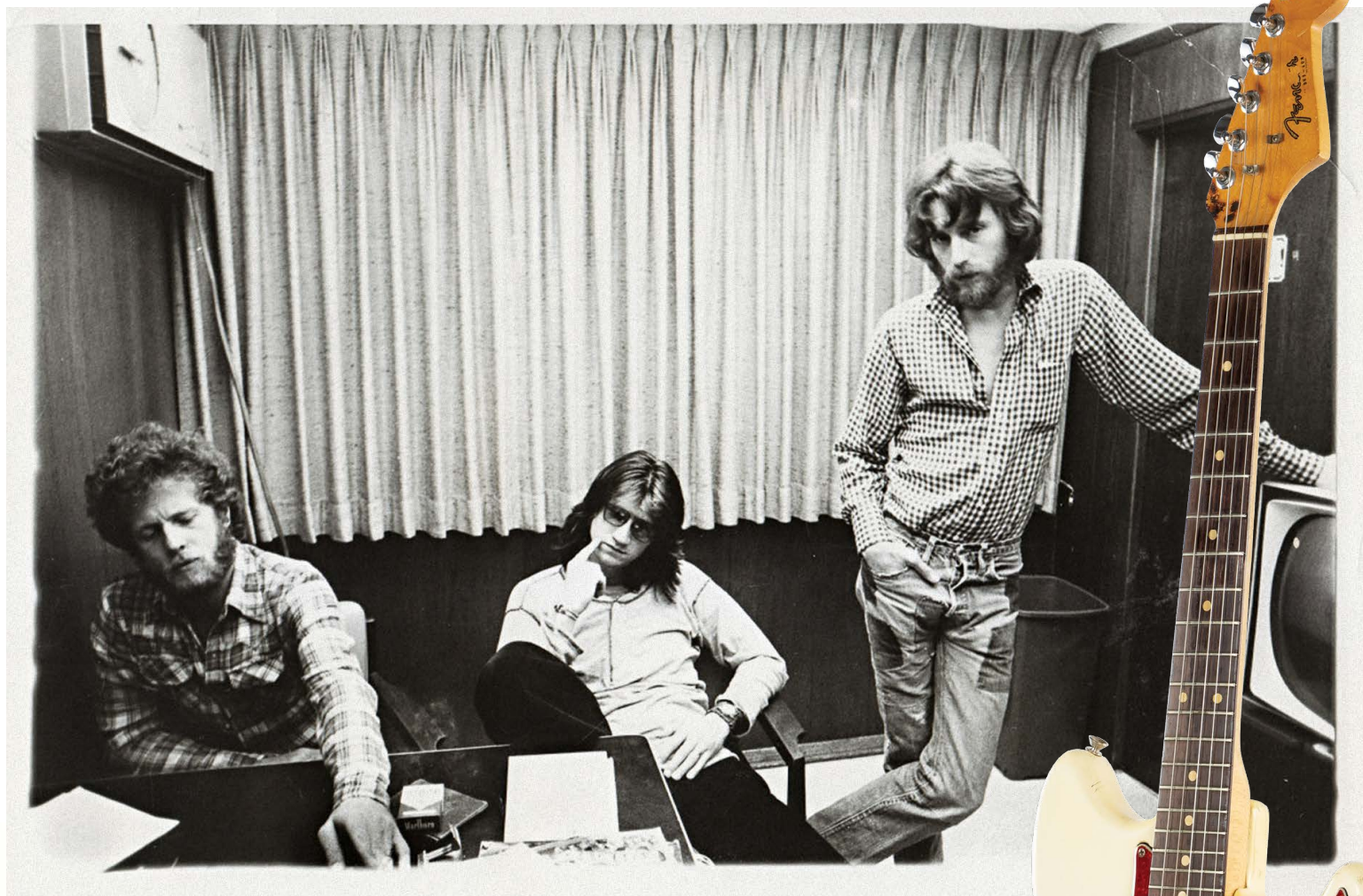
ARTIFACT COURTESY OF JD SOUTHER

OPPOSITE PAGE: Chris Hillman, Richie Furay, and JD Souther of the Souther-Hillman-Furay Band, c. 1974

PHOTO BY HENRY DILTZ / COURTESY OF CHRIS HILLMAN

JD Souther used this modified 1963 Fender Duo-Sonic guitar with the Souther-Hillman-Furay Band.

ARTIFACT COURTESY OF JD SOUTHER

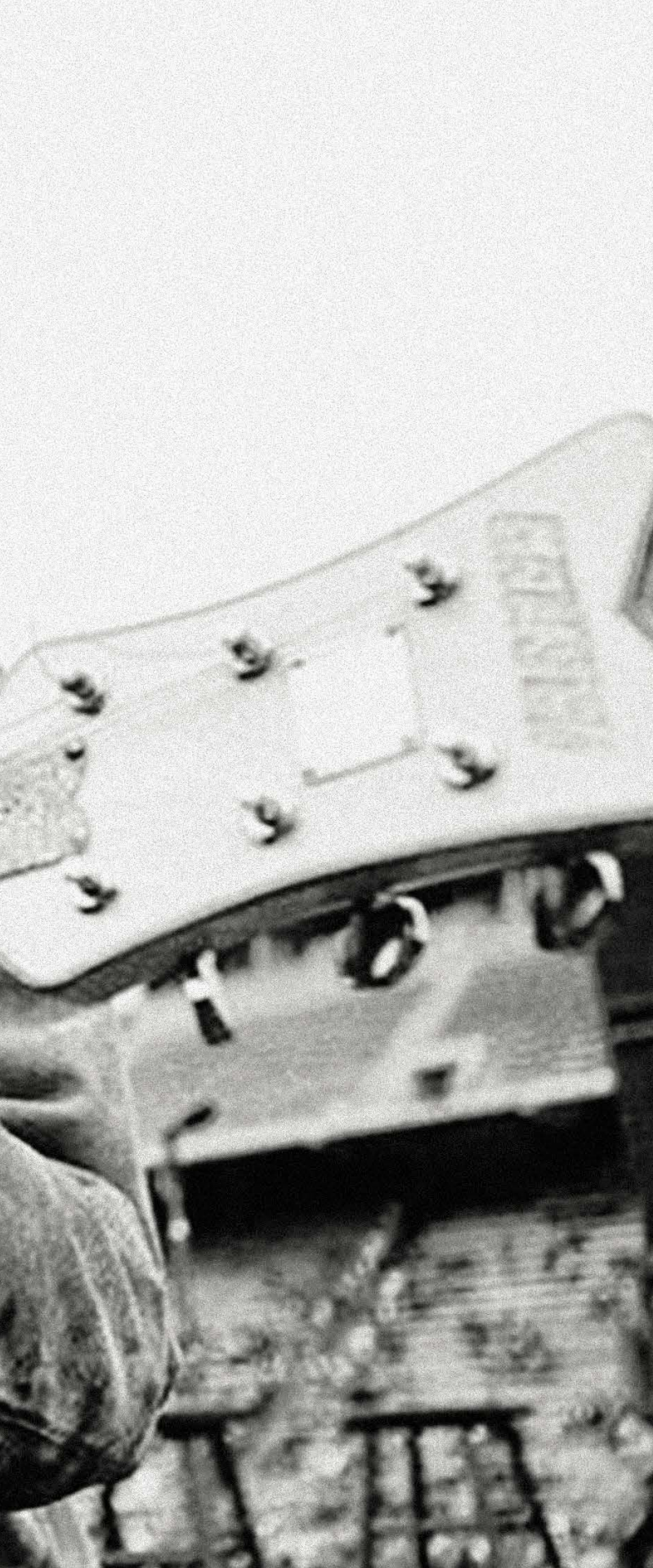


Those 1971 sessions yielded the most successful album of Young's career, *Harvest*, which reached #1 early the following year and gave him his first, and only, *Billboard* Hot 100 #1 hit single in "Heart of Gold." More important to Young, it introduced him to steel guitarist Ben Keith, who became a key collaborator of Young's until Keith's death in 2010.

"I love every sound he makes—no matter what the [heck] it is," Young said when introducing Keith onstage in 1973.







It was also in Nashville that Young first teamed with producer Elliot Mazer and ace studio musicians including bassist Tim Drummond and drummer Kenny Buttrey, part of an ad hoc group nicknamed the Stray Gators, who would join Young on several tours and records.

The efficiency of the Nashville recording process appealed to Young's penchant for spontaneity. "*Harvest* was just easy," he told author Jimmy McDonough in his 2002 biography, *Shakey*. "I liked it because it happened *fast*, kind of an accidental thing—I wasn't looking for the Nashville Sound, they were the musicians that were there. They got my stuff down and we did it. Just come in, go out—that's the way they do it in Nashville."

It wasn't to last, of course, given Young's restless desire to stay out of any comfort zones. "This song put me in the middle of the road," Young wrote of "Heart of Gold" in the liner notes for his 1977 career retrospective album, *Decade*. "Traveling there soon became a bore, so I headed for the ditch."

Before heading out on that rockier road, however, Young had shepherded the marriage of L.A. rock and country music to the top of the pop charts.

Neil Young at the soundcheck for Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young's concert at Balboa Stadium, San Diego, December 21, 1969

PHOTO BY HENRY DILTZ

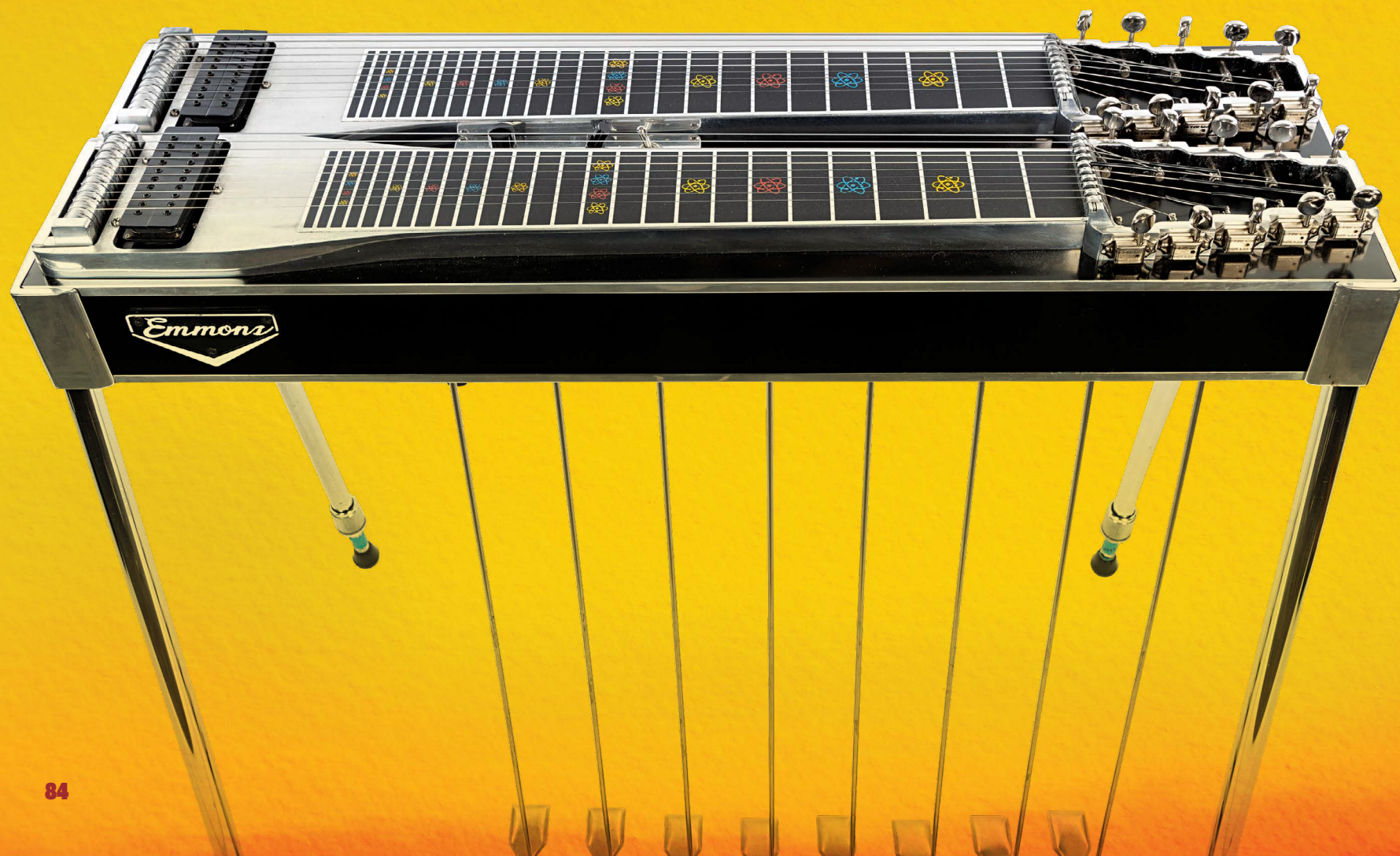
CONTINUED ON PAGE 89

PEDAL TO THE METAL: THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF STEEL GUITAR IN COUNTRY-ROCK

BY STEVE FISHELL

JayDee Maness used this 1969 Emmons D-10 pedal steel guitar when he was in the house band at the Palomino Club (1970–1974) and on hundreds of recordings.

ARTIFACT COURTESY OF JAYDEE MANESS

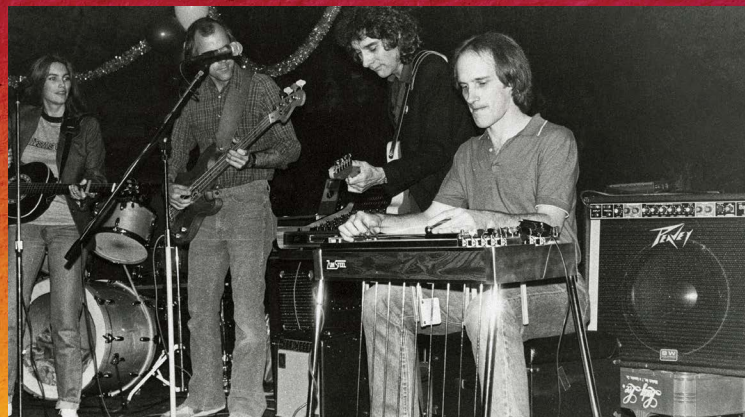




When the Byrds journeyed to Nashville in March 1968 to make their next album, they traded in their twelve-string, folk-rock style for country songs played on banjos, fiddles, and pedal steel guitars. At his first session, famed Nashville steel guitarist Lloyd Green asked the Byrds where he should play in the songs. “Everywhere!” they said.

Green responded with a rousing intro for Bob Dylan’s “You Ain’t Goin’ Nowhere,” and sessions for the Byrds’ trailblazing *Sweetheart of the Rodeo* album took flight. “They had no preconceptions about how they were going to cut the record or how the steel should fit in,” remembered Green. “I was free to do what I wanted.”

During later sessions for the album in L.A., the band wanted even more steel. “After hearing what I’d played on his International Submarine Band project, Gram Parsons called me for the *Sweetheart* sessions,” recalled steel master JayDee Maness. “I didn’t know much about their history. I was there to do a good job and play country music.”



Initially, *Sweetheart of the Rodeo* was a musical departure that alienated many Byrds fans. “Even though it wasn’t a commercial success, *Sweetheart* was the Big Bang,” said Jeff Hanna, co-founder of the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band. “Everyone I knew who bought it went out and started a country-rock band.”

The pedal steel was a big part of that album’s influential sound. The instrument’s distinctive tone and ever-moving chordal voicings added a sweet, colorful backdrop beneath the soaring vocal harmonies of Southern California’s new hybrid “country-rock” sound. For new listeners, steel offered a stark, exotic contrast to the power-chord rock of Jimi Hendrix, Cream, and Led Zeppelin.

JayDee Maness with Buck Owens & the Buckaroos, 1969

FROM LEFT: Doyle Holly, Don Rich, Buck Owens, Jerry Wiggins, and Maness

Steve Fishell (foreground) jams with Emmylou Harris, bass player Michael Bowden, and guitarist Albert Lee at a club in Camarillo, California, c. 1982.

PHOTO BY RANDALL LAMB / COURTESY OF STEVE FISHELL

In 1968, around the same time the Byrds were taking off with *Sweetheart*, another watershed moment for West Coast pedal steel came when twenty-two-year-old virtuoso Rusty Young added tasteful fills to Buffalo Springfield's "Kind Woman," written by Richie Furay. Rock fans were captivated by the new sound. Buffalo Springfield soon disbanded, but bandmates Furay and Jim Messina, along with Young, embraced the new hybrid sound and reconfigured as a country-rock band, Poco.

L.A.-based steel players represented diverse styles and backgrounds. All shared a common vision: to move pedal steel beyond traditional country music into genres like rock, pop, and folk. Many players were inspired by Nashville legend Buddy Emmons, whose unequaled musical and engineering gifts made an enormous impact on modern steel's development. Early West Coast innovators like Joaquin Murphey, Speedy West, and Ralph Mooney influenced steel players everywhere, especially in California. Mooney's soulful, driving, honky-tonk style—with showers of sharply picked, rolling notes—distinguished early hits by Wynn Stewart, Buck Owens, and Merle Haggard.

Emmons—himself a fan of Murphey, West, and Mooney—moved from Nashville to Southern California in 1968. He graced Judy Collins's gorgeous rendition of Ian Tyson's "Someday Soon" (1969) and became one of L.A.'s first-call session players.



Rusty Young wore this Nudie's Rodeo Tailors jacket with Poco, c. 1969.

ARTIFACT COURTESY OF MARY YOUNG

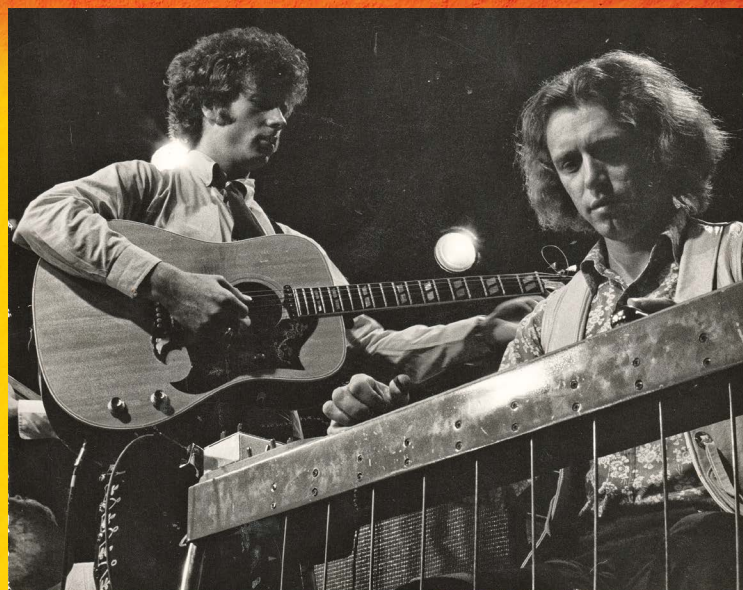
Chris Hillman and Sneaky Pete Kleinow of the Flying Burrito Brothers at San Francisco's Fillmore West, 1969

PHOTO COURTESY OF CHRIS HILLMAN

Other country-rooted steel veterans like Red Rhodes (James Taylor's "Sweet Baby James"), Tom Brumley (Rick Nelson's "Garden Party"), Ben Keith (Neil Young's "Heart of Gold"), and Jay Dee Maness made indelible, influential contributions to the West Coast steel sound.

Inspired by steel's uncanny ability to mimic the human voice, folk, bluegrass, and rock musicians adopted the instrument. Multi-instrumentalist David Lindley pioneered a heart-stopping lap steel style, overdriving his vintage instruments through customized amplifiers cranked up to eleven on Jackson Browne songs like "Running on Empty." Jerry Garcia's bouncing steel licks added playful color to Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young's "Teach Your Children." Texan Al Perkins recorded with the Flying Burrito Brothers and the Rolling Stones, then joined Stephen Stills's Manassas with former Byrds and Burrito Brothers co-founder Chris Hillman. Bernie Leadon, another ex-Burrito Brother, took up steel and, when not playing lead electric guitar, contributed appealing fills to songs like "Best of My Love" with his new band, the Eagles.

Few players made as many inroads into rock and pop as Flying Burrito Brothers co-founder Sneaky Pete Kleinow. A pioneering stylist, Kleinow employed his own unique eight-string tuning on a vintage Fender steel, creating adventurous, careening, symphonic sounds unlike anything heard before. He became the player of choice for a



diverse range of artists including Joni Mitchell, Joe Cocker, Fleetwood Mac, and Stevie Wonder. California's progressive atmosphere encouraged experimentation. Pedal steel proved to be a great driver for special effects like phase shifting, distortion, and tape echo. Poco's Rusty Young even played through a Leslie cabinet, emulating a Hammond B-3 organ.

L.A.'s country-rock inspired an entirely new generation of steel guitarists. Scores took the plunge: Dan Dugmore, Ed Black, Greg Leisz, Hank DeVito, and I were transfixed by the sound, learned how to play, and went on to enjoy fulfilling professional careers. Southern California proved to be very fertile ground for the pedal steel guitar. Players there turned the instrument's traditional conventions upside down, helped expand its popularity, and dispelled any notion that all roads for steel guitar led to Nashville. Ω





CONTINUED FROM PAGE 83

BREAKTHROUGHS: THE EAGLES, LINDA RONSTADT, AND EMMYLOU HARRIS

But the sound of country-rock would soon reach its zenith with the Eagles. When Ronstadt and manager John Boylan brought Longbranch/Pennywhistle singer and songwriter Glenn Frey together with Shiloh drummer Don Henley to back her, they midwived the birth of one of the most successful songwriting teams in rock music history. Ronstadt quickly recognized the potential in their scintillating vocal harmony blend and gave them her blessing to branch out on their own.

Coincidentally, Hillman, Parsons, and the Flying Burrito Brothers had already made an important impression on the future Eagles too, but not in the way they might have wished. Leadon had seen the Burritos deliver a sloppy show at the Troubadour one night, one that served as an object lesson for the Eagles.

“Here come the Burrito Brothers, they got all their [Nudie] suits on, they get up [and I think] ‘Well, this is going to be something!’ Right? They sucked, they were horrible,” he said. “They were so undisciplined; they couldn’t start a song together.”

Eagles at Joshua Tree National Park, 1972

FROM LEFT: Randy Meisner, Don Henley, Bernie Leadon, and Glenn Frey

PHOTO BY HENRY DILTZ



Bernie Leadon played this extensively modified 1962 Fender Telecaster onstage and in the studio with the Eagles, including on "Take It Easy," "Peaceful Easy Feeling," and "Tequila Sunrise." Inside the guitar's hollowed-out body is the B-bender mechanism Leadon used to replicate the twang of a pedal steel guitar by bending and raising the pitch of the B string.

ARTIFACT COURTESY OF BERNIE LEADON

His new compatriots vowed not to make that mistake. “All the Eagle guys were really motivated,” Leadon said. “We really wanted to succeed. We wanted to be so rehearsed, so tight, that [even] if everybody’s exhausted, two guys have the flu, and two other guys aren’t speaking, that we could go out and do a really professional show where you’re not going to know any of that stuff’s going on. . . . So, we never did a bad show.”

The quartet’s 1972 debut album, *Eagles*, put the group’s inviting country-rock instrumental blend and meticulous, layered vocal harmonies onto the charts right away. The single “Take It Easy,” which Frey helped Jackson Browne finish, reached #12 on the *Billboard* pop chart. (“Glenn came up with the song’s best line,” Browne said recently, crediting him for the line *It’s a girl, my Lord, in a flatbed Ford, slowin’ down to take a look at me.*) It was followed quickly by the group’s first Top Ten song, “Witchy Woman,” written by Henley and Leadon.

The group’s two primary voices—Frey’s clean, rock-rooted tenor and Henley’s dusky, high baritone that was as much Memphis soul as Texas drawl—combined exquisitely, and blended seamlessly with the upper-register high harmonies and occasional leads served up first by bass player Randy Meisner and then by his replacement, Timothy B. Schmit.

Bernie Leadon played this Vega Tubaphone #3 model five-string banjo on Eagles’ recordings, including “Midnight Flyer” from their 1974 album, *On the Border*.

ARTIFACT COURTESY OF
BERNIE LEADON



The talk in the street
 sounds so familiar
 Great Expectations
 every body's watchin' you
 the people you meet
 they all seem to know you
 Even your old friends
~~they~~ treat you like you're somethin' new

Johnny came lately
 New kid in town
 Everybody loves you
 you can't let them down

She looks in your eyes
 the music begins to play ^(folks to go)
 hopeless vacillates ^(high school hearts don't last)
 dancing into the light ^(we'll never see you)
~~After a while~~ ^(desperate to try again) ^{have we go}
~~desperate to try again~~ ^(desperate to try again) ^{again}
 After a while
 dancing the night away
 restless hearts
 just never mend

Painting pictures I got so bad
 I hate to say it but ~~they~~
 sometimes I like I never have single
 but you were just tryin'
 to give me the sad if you love me

BEAUTIFUL FACES (AND) EARTH PEARLS
 LOOK AT THE WAY THAT WE CURE
 BURN IN THE HOT LIPS
 LATER ITS NOT QUITE
 (BURN) THAT BURN BRIGHT
 IN THE HOT LIPS
 IF ITS A good night
 you burn in the hot lips
 till the sun is gone

HOTEL CALIFORNIA
 OUTLAW MAN
 DOOLIN DALTON
 7 BRIDGES ROAD

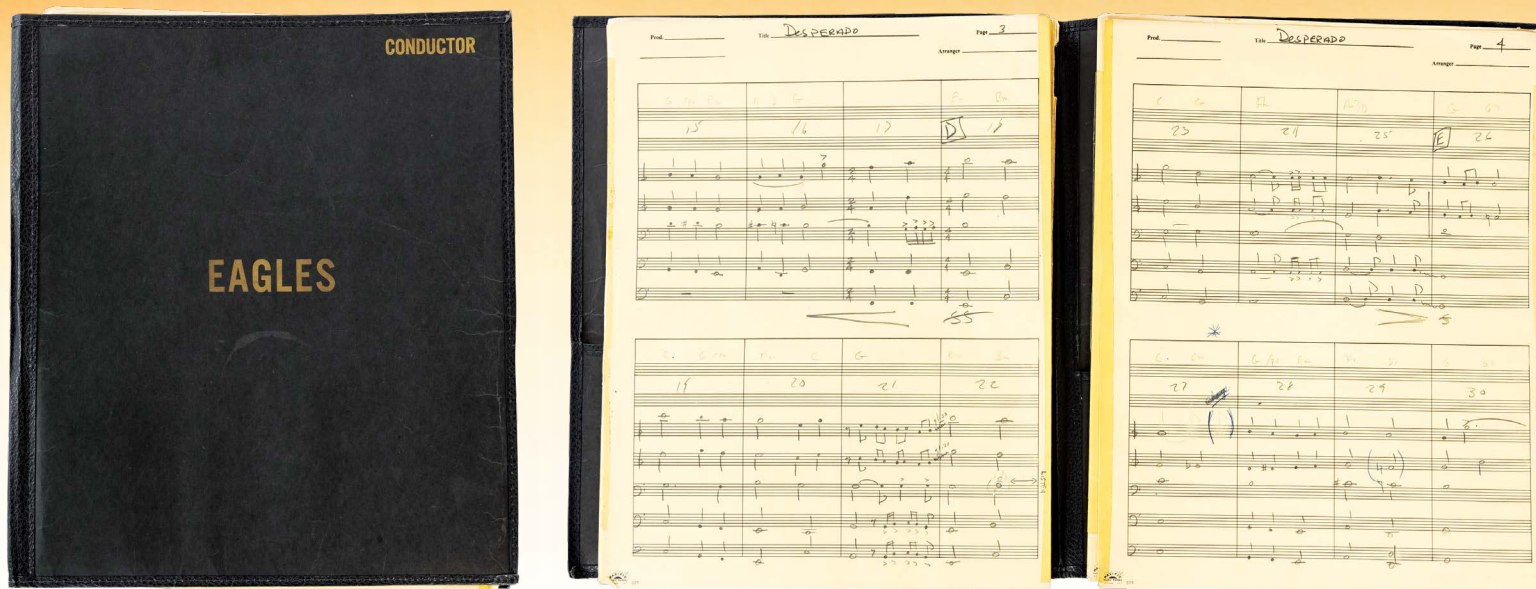
LYIN EYES
 WASTED TIME (STRINGS)
 TAKE IT TO THE LIMIT (STRINGS)
 NEW KID

DESPERADO (STRINGS)
 DESPERADO INTERLUDE (STRINGS)
 MIDNIGHT FLYER
 TURN TO STONE
 ALREADY GONE

WASTED TIME INTERLUDE
 ONE OF THESE NIGHTS
 FUNK 49
 GOOD DAY IN HELL
 R.M.W.
 WITCHY

JAMES DEAN
 BEST OF MY LOVE
 WALK AWAY
 TEQUILA

TAKE IT EASY



The Eagles, like Ronstadt, also made way for material from the community out of which they sprang, writing and/or recording songs not only with Browne but other Southern California figures including Jack Tempchin (“Already Gone”), Gene Clark (“Train Leaves Here This Morning,” written with Leadon), and JD Souther (“Doolin-Dalton”). Tapping the L.A. singer-songwriter talent pool took their songs thematically beyond the typical livin’, lovin’, losin’ songs that had long dominated mainstream country music.

Browne was beginning to have chart success of his own with a Top Ten single, “Doctor My Eyes,” from his 1972 debut album, *Jackson Browne* (aka *Saturate Before Using*). Several more singles kept the Eagles on radio airwaves

and made them an increasingly popular concert attraction. It took until their third album, *On the Border*, however, for Frey, Henley, and the band to score their first #1 single, “Best of My Love,” which the group’s leaders had written with Frey’s Longbranch/Pennywhistle bandmate Souther.

TOP: Jim Ed Norman composed this score and conducted London’s Philharmonic Orchestra when the Eagles recorded “Desperado” at London’s Island Studios in 1973.

ARTIFACT COURTESY OF JIM ED NORMAN

OPPOSITE PAGE, LEFT: JD Souther’s handwritten lyrics to “New Kid in Town” and “Best of My Love.” Co-written with Glenn Frey and Don Henley, both songs were #1 hits for the Eagles.

ARTIFACTS COURTESY OF JD SOUTHER

Set list used by the Eagles in concert, c. 1977

ARTIFACT COURTESY OF JIM ED NORMAN

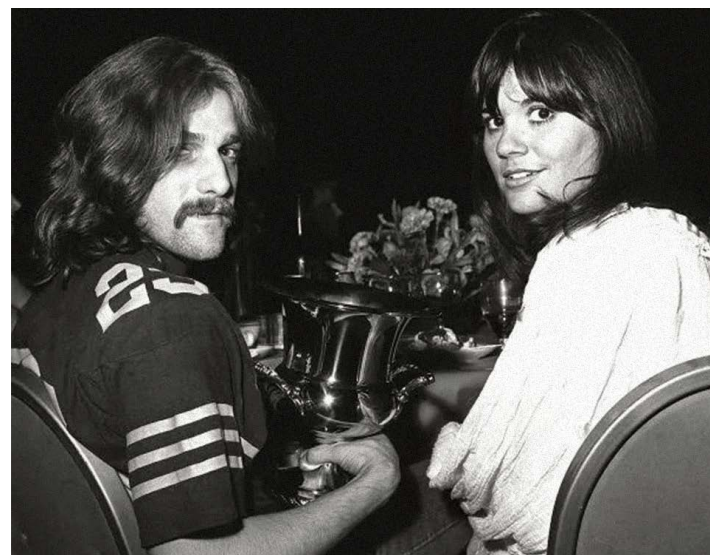
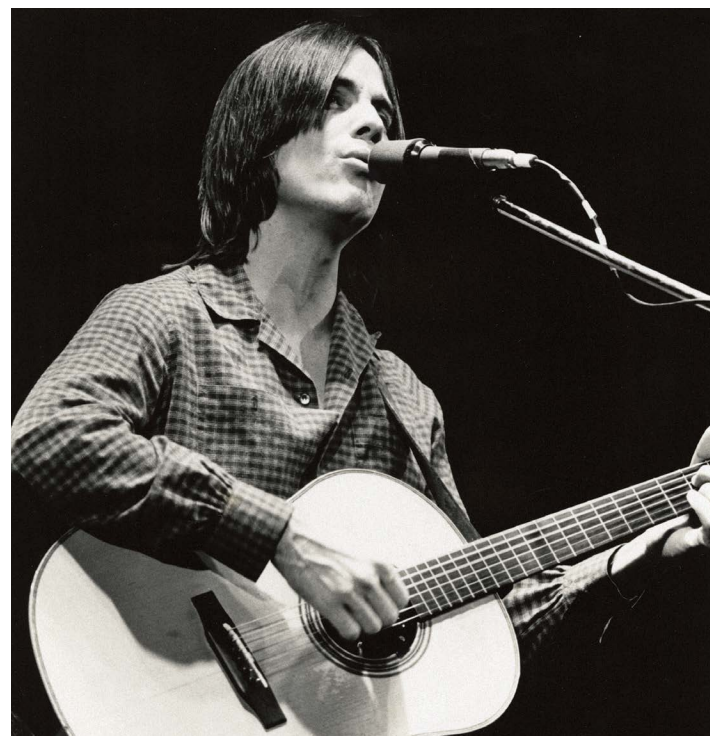


It helped push the album into the Top Twenty, paving the way for the Eagles' massive breakthrough in 1975 with *One of These Nights*, a commercial blockbuster that spent five weeks at #1. It produced another #1 hit—the title track—plus two more that made the pop Top Five: “Lyn’ Eyes” (#2) and “Take It to the Limit.” Whereas a few years earlier these guys were schmoozing in the Troubadour’s bar, now they were headlining stadiums.

Meanwhile, Ronstadt continued her own steady rise, spotlighting talented new songwriters on her way up. She landed a Top 100 single in 1972 with her version of Browne’s “Rock Me on the Water” and reached #51 with Eric Kaz and Libby Titus’s “Love Has No Pride.” She finally scored her first #1 single in 1974, with Clint Ballard Jr.’s “You’re No Good,” which propelled the *Heart Like a Wheel* album that contained it to the top of the charts as well.

The pieces came together for Ronstadt after she tapped Peter Asher to produce *Heart Like a Wheel*. A string of Top Ten albums followed through the ’70s and into the ’80s, among them *Simple Dreams*, which held the top spot on *Billboard*’s pop album rankings for five weeks in 1977.

Also taking over as her manager, Asher, half of the ’60s British folk-rock duo Peter & Gordon, had come to L.A. to manage James Taylor, whom he’d originally signed to the Beatles’ Apple Records in 1968.



Glenn Frey and Linda Ronstadt, 1977. PHOTO BY JAMES FORTUNE

TOP: Jackson Browne, 1978. PHOTO BY BILL STRAUS

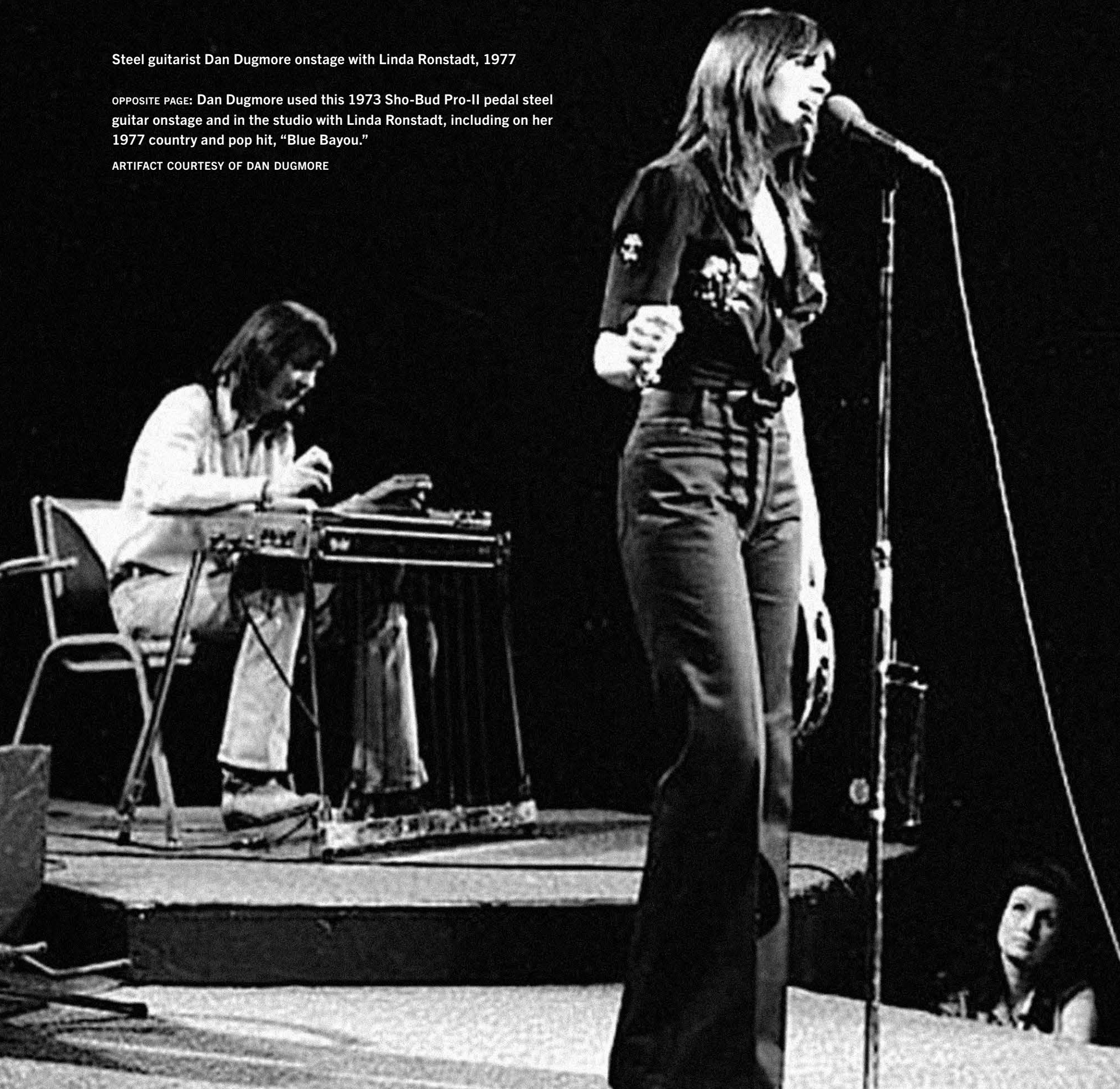
OPPOSITE PAGE: JD Souther joins Linda Ronstadt on stage at Universal Amphitheatre, Los Angeles, October 1, 1977.

PHOTO BY HENRY DILTZ / COURTESY OF JD SOUTHER

Steel guitarist Dan Dugmore onstage with Linda Ronstadt, 1977

OPPOSITE PAGE: Dan Dugmore used this 1973 Sho-Bud Pro-II pedal steel guitar onstage and in the studio with Linda Ronstadt, including on her 1977 country and pop hit, "Blue Bayou."

ARTIFACT COURTESY OF DAN DUGMORE



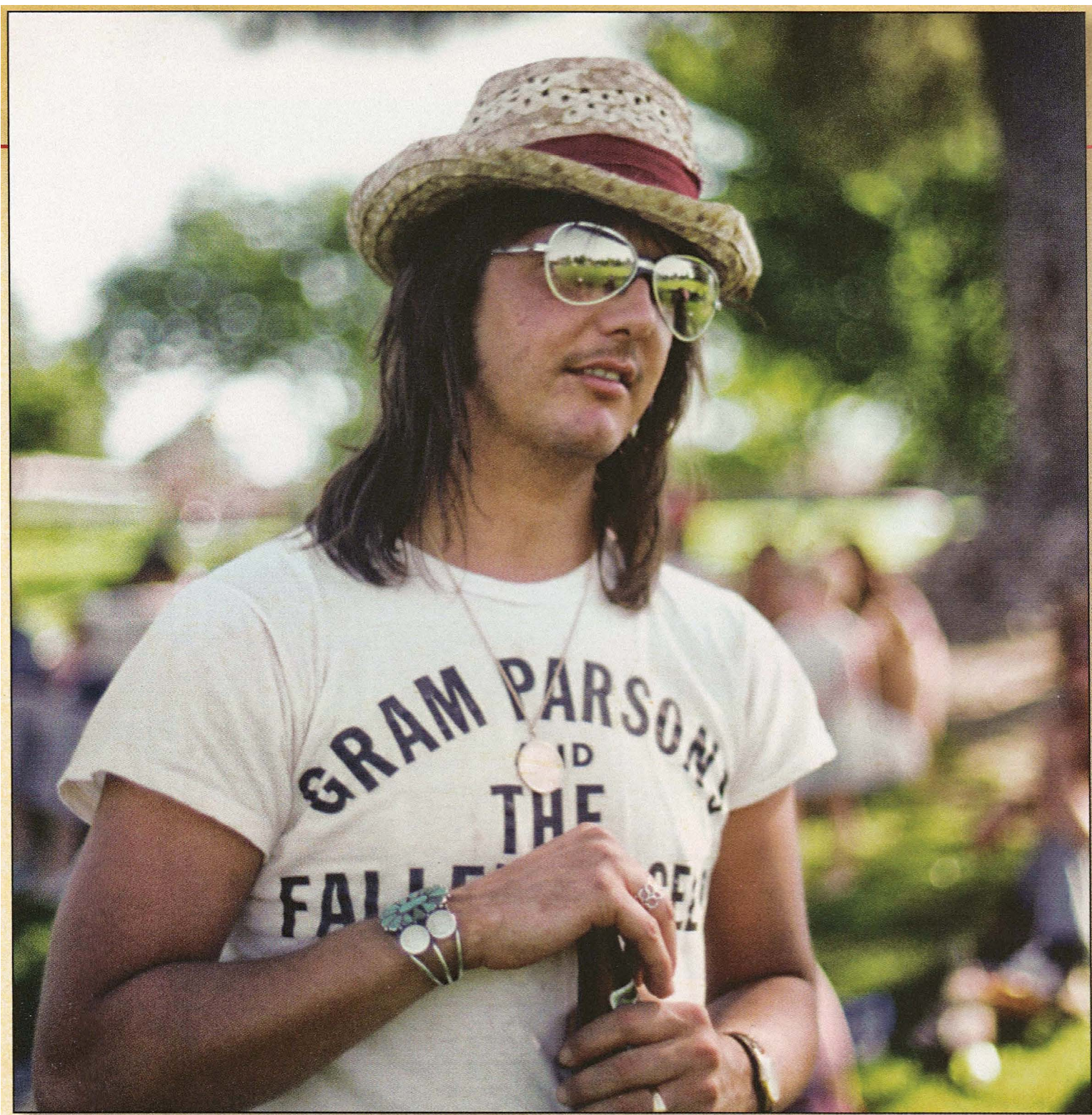
“I was [in New York] for a few months altogether, and then moved to L.A.,” Asher said recently, “because it was clear that L.A. was where the action was in regard to the kind of music that James was making.”

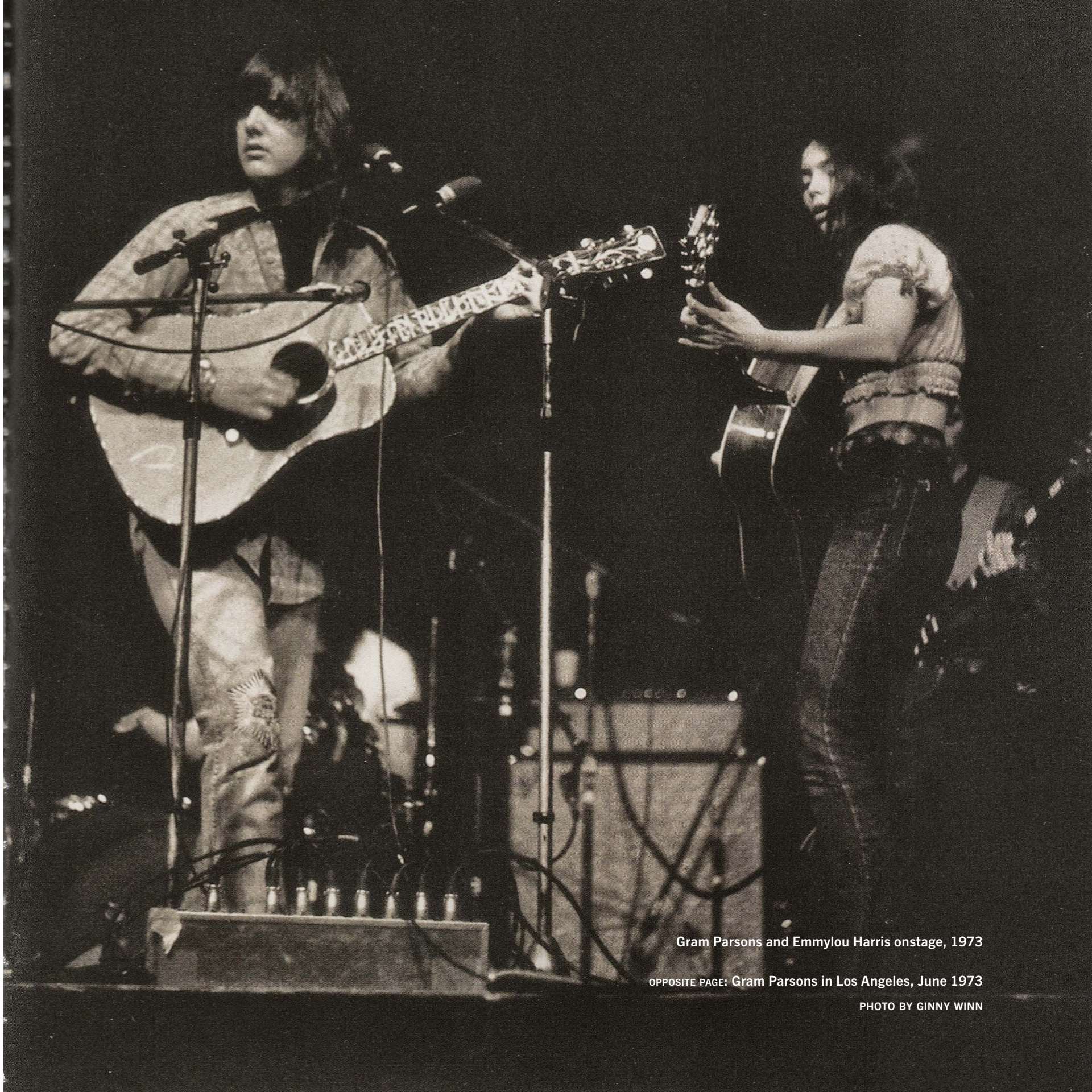
After having produced Taylor’s self-titled debut album for Apple, Asher then produced Taylor’s 1970 follow-up, *Sweet Baby James*, and his next two albums for Burbank-based Warner Bros. Records using several musicians from L.A.’s music community. Although Taylor hailed from Boston, he grew up in North Carolina, and he framed many of his songs in country-rock settings, notably the waltzing, steel guitar-drenched “Sweet Baby James.” Others showed his fondness for folk, R&B, soul, and blues styles, helping lift the 1970 album to #3 in *Billboard*.

L.A. country-rock was becoming a powerhouse force in pop music. But it was not all smooth sailing. After being fired by Hillman from the Flying Burrito Brothers for his increasingly erratic escapades, Gram Parsons signed a solo deal in 1972 with A&M Records. Hillman still considered him a friend, if no longer a musical collaborator; when Parsons said he was seeking a female singer for duets he wanted to record, Hillman instantly thought of Emmylou Harris, whom he’d encountered recently in a Washington, D.C., folk club.

“Meeting Gram, for me, it’s kind of like that: the Big Bang, the huge turning point,” Harris said recently. “I didn’t quite get country music for the first bit of time I was with him. But I had a chance to go on the road and







Gram Parsons and Emmylou Harris onstage, 1973

OPPOSITE PAGE: Gram Parsons in Los Angeles, June 1973

PHOTO BY GINNY WINN



make some money, and it's the first time I ever played in front of a band with drums and the electric instruments, everything. . . . As a folk singer you just didn't do that. But I discovered there was a real joy to it."

As much as Harris and Parsons clicked musically and personally while working on his 1973 debut solo album, *GP*, Parsons's downward spiral was accelerating as he descended further into addiction. He died September 19, 1973, at age twenty-six, from a drug overdose. His second album, *Grievous Angel*, was released posthumously in 1974, and reached only #195 in *Billboard*.

Harris was devastated but pushed ahead as a solo act. Her major-label debut in 1975, *Pieces of the Sky*, featured many of the L.A. musicians who'd been working in and around Parsons: Ronstadt, Leadon, Pedersen, guitarist Burton, pianist Glen D. Hardin, and fiddler Byron Berline.

Through her first four albums following the death of Parsons—*Pieces of the Sky*, *Elite Hotel*, *Luxury Liner*, and *Quarter Moon in a Ten Cent Town*, all recorded chiefly in Los Angeles—Harris almost single-handedly created a new template for progressive country music. She found a way to honor tradition and celebrate innovation

Emmylou Harris acquired this 1955 Gibson J-200 with custom black finish in the 1970s. The rose inlay and three-segment saddle on the moustache bridge were added by luthier Danny Ferrington.

simultaneously, bringing new life to vintage material by such standard-bearers as the Louvin Brothers, Dolly Parton, George Jones, and Merle Haggard while introducing many listeners to powerful emerging writers, including Rodney Crowell, Susanna Clark, Townes Van Zandt, Guy Clark, and Jesse Winchester, and continuing to champion songs from Burrito Brothers members Parsons, Hillman, and Chris Ethridge.

Harris transplanted her artistic vision to Nashville when she moved east in the early '80s to further explore the intersectional possibilities between acoustic bluegrass, country, rock & roll, folk, and gospel in a string of acclaimed albums that burnished her reputation as a tastemaker through the '80s and beyond.

Following the massive success of “One of These Nights,” the Eagles headed further into rock, in part a reflection of Frey’s background as a rock dude from Detroit. Leadon left, and was replaced by James Gang guitar hero Joe Walsh. Randy Meisner’s 1977 exit opened the door for Timothy B. Schmit—the singer-bassist who had taken Meisner’s place in Poco when he joined the Eagles.

Emmylou Harris wore this Nudie’s Rodeo Tailors cowgirl outfit onstage with Gram Parsons and during her solo career. Designed for actress Gail Davis, star of the popular 1950s TV Western series *Annie Oakley*, the costume was never retrieved from Nudie’s shop, where Harris purchased it in the early 1970s.







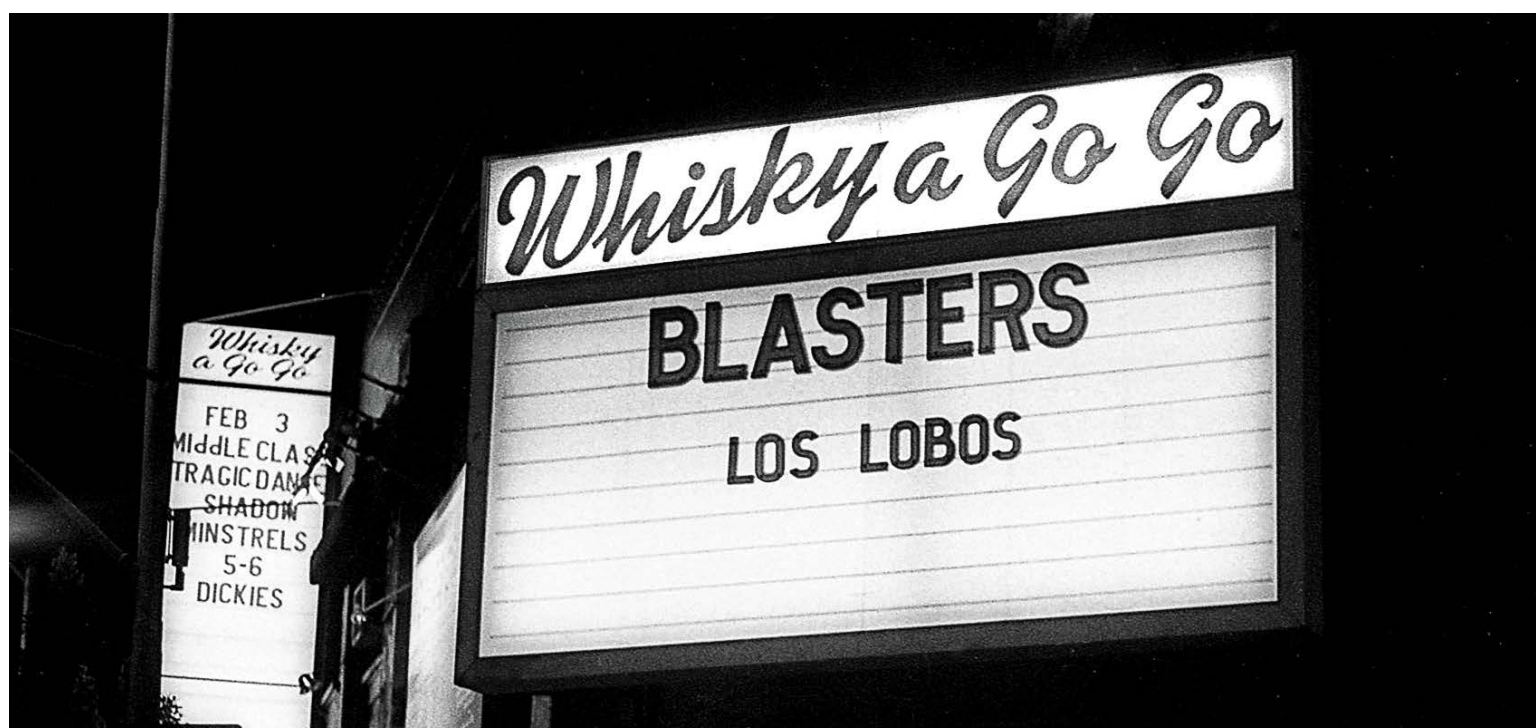
The group soared higher yet with *Hotel California*, creating one of the best-selling studio albums in pop music history. It held the #1 spot for eight weeks in 1976 and generated two #1 hit singles: “New Kid in Town” and the title track, plus “Life in the Fast Lane,” which reached #11.

The group soon became one of the most critically acclaimed bands of the '70s as well as one of the most commercially successful. *Los Angeles Times* pop music critic Robert Hilburn lauded *Hotel California* as “a legitimate rock masterpiece,” one that unflinchingly examined the price that fame and fortune can exact from those who find their way to the upper reaches of pop culture success.

In 1979, the Eagles released *The Long Run*, which topped *Hotel California* by logging nine weeks atop the nation's album chart. Three more Top Ten singles emerged, including the #1 “Heartache Tonight,” a quintessential demonstration of the group's picture-perfect harmonies.

But the pressure of chasing perfection for a decade combined with tensions among members, and the Eagles called it quits in 1980. The acrimony was such that Henley, answering a question about when the group might reunite, said, “When hell freezes over.” The phrase came back to haunt, and advertise, their eventual resurrection

Emmylou Harris & the Hot Band opening for Elton John at Dodger Stadium, Los Angeles, October 25, 1975. PHOTO BY DAN REEDER



more than a decade later. And in a musical twist of fate, much as the Flying Burrito Brothers' erratic show a decade earlier had inspired the Eagles toward a committedly professional performance ethic, in the decade ahead, the Eagles' own mega-success pushed some of their country-rock progeny toward a new, more down-to-earth version of the sound they had perfected.

THE EIGHTIES: BACK TO BASICS

The Eagles' multiplatinum success represented, for some, a dark side of the music industry's phenomenal growth during the '70s. Albums took increasingly long to create as groups spent more and more time—and money—aiming for perfection in the studio. This put record-making beyond the reach of many aspiring young players. A do-it-yourself ethos emerged in the mid- and late-'70s, in the form of garage rock and punk music. In London, New York, Detroit, Los Angeles, and other metropolitan areas, a new wave of bands emphasized brash attitude and outsized emotion over instrumental and vocal proficiency.

This battered 1964 Fender Mustang was Dave Alvin's primary guitar with the Blasters and the Knitters.

ARTIFACT COURTESY OF DAVE ALVIN

OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP: **The Blasters at Fitzgerald's, Houston, Texas, 1984**
FROM LEFT: **Dave Alvin, John Bazz, and Bill Bateman.** PHOTO BY BEN DESOTO,
HOUSTON CHRONICLE

The Blasters and Los Lobos shared the bill at the Whisky a Go Go, West Hollywood, January 1982. PHOTO BY JOEL APARICIO



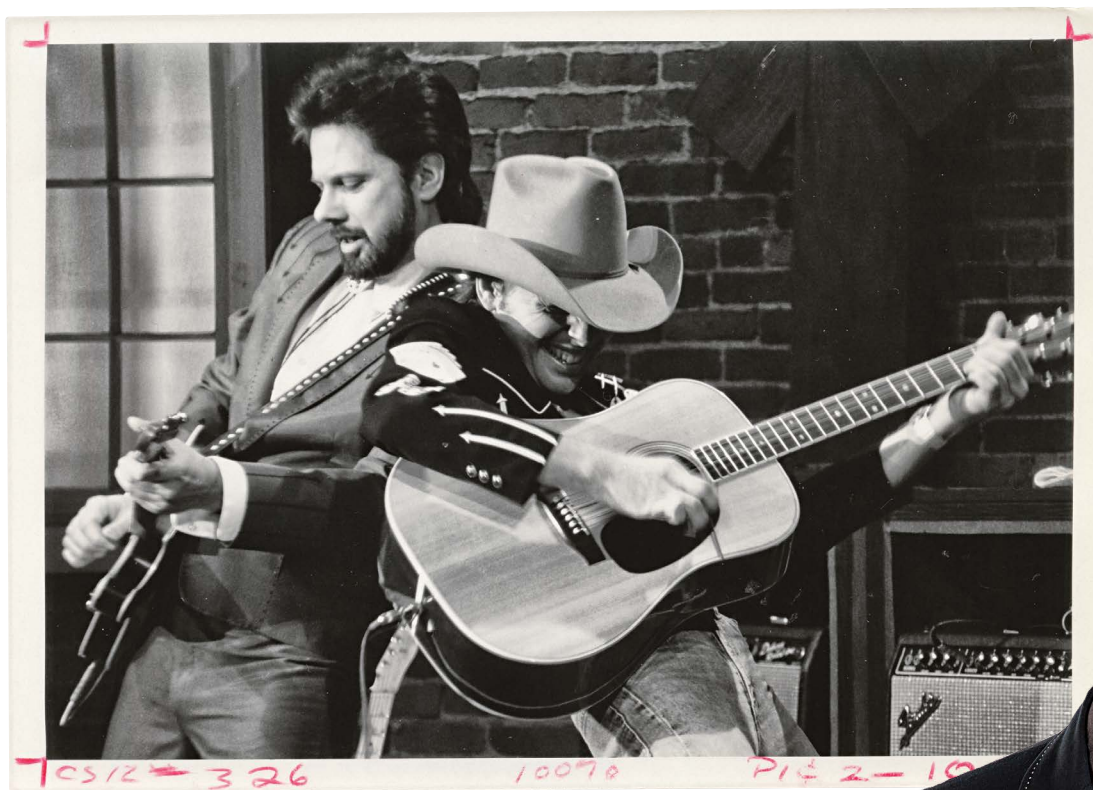


In L.A., as elsewhere, what started as a liberating break from the status quo rapidly developed its own rigid set of rules: eardrum-busting volume, runaway locomotive tempos, mohawk haircuts, and music reeking of rage.

Musicians who had grown up with some exposure to the vast realms of American music that included early rock & roll, country, folk, blues, and/or jazz soon bridled at this new set of limitations and began rebelling against the punk rebellion—or at least pushing at its boundaries.

Seeded in part by a reaction to punk, a roots-music revival sprouted in England and New York as well as L.A. Perhaps the most commercially successful act to emerge from this trend was the Stray Cats neo-rockabilly trio from New York, whose significant record sales helped bring record company support to the movement.

Among the handful of L.A. venues that were willing to host combative punk rock shows, some also started to welcome scrappy, homegrown rockabilly, country-rock, and roots acts such as the Blasters, Los Lobos, Lone Justice, the Knitters, Rank and File, and the Long Ryders. As in previous decades, L.A.'s open-minded musical sensibility also continued to draw outsiders. Kentucky country maverick Dwight Yoakam; Louisiana-bred singer-songwriter Lucinda Williams; Indiana singer-songwriter John Hiatt; San Antonio singer, guitarist,



and songwriter Rosie Flores; and North Carolina's Jim Lauderdale all found enthusiastic audiences in L.A. Many admired what Emmylou Harris had been doing in Southern California, first with Gram Parsons, then on her own and with the Hot Band, so they packed up and headed to L.A. "I used to always say, born in Kentucky,

TOP: Pete Anderson and Dwight Yoakam, 1986

PHOTOS BY ALAN L. MAYOR

RIGHT: This bolero jacket with rhinestones and embroidery was designed for Dwight Yoakam by Manuel Cuevas, c. 1986.

OPPOSITE PAGE: Dwight Yoakam wore this Stetson hat and Mex Tex brand jacket in the 1986 music video for "Honky Tonk Man."

ARTIFACTS COURTESY OF DWIGHT YOAKAM





raised in Ohio, but I grew up in California,” Yoakam told a PBS interviewer in 2019, outlining the elements he fused in his California country-drenched music. “Emmylou Harris actually was a great influence on me moving to L.A., as was the connection to the previous California country music generation, like [Buck Owens’s band] the Buckaroos and Merle Haggard, that kind of Bakersfield honky-tonk sound. That intrigued me.”

A remarkably rich and inclusive scene developed, spanning punk, vintage rock, introspective folk, edgy

Dwight Yoakam’s 1989 Martin HD-28P

ARTIFACT COURTESY OF DWIGHT YOAKAM

TOP: Dwight Yoakam performs at Fan Fair at Nashville’s Fairgrounds, June 1986. PHOTO BY ALAN L. MAYOR



Los Lobos, Dwight Yoakam, and his band at The Keystone, Palo Alto, California, 1984. FROM LEFT: Steve Berlin, Louie Pérez, David Hidalgo, Cesar Rosas, Conrad Lozano (kneeling), Dwight Yoakam, Pete Anderson, Jeff Donovan (kneeling), and JD Foster. PHOTO BY JOEL APARICIO

country, down-and-dirty blues, and Mexican music that had long thrived in and around L.A.

“When we discovered the Blasters, we said, ‘Wow, here is a scene-within-a-scene that we might fit into,’” Los Lobos’ songwriter Louie Pérez told journalist Chris Morris in his 2015 biography, *Los Lobos: Dream in Blue*. “What we’re doing with the Tex-Mex and the Ritchie Valens stuff,

it fits. Now people are listening to different things.” It inspired members of seminal L.A. punk group X to start a side project, the Knitters, exploring their passion for country and folk music. X lead singer Exene Cervenka, bassist-singer John Doe, and drummer D.J. Bonebrake teamed with Blasters lead guitarist Dave Alvin and Red Devils bassist Jonny Ray Bartel in 1982, and landed a record deal of their own. The Knitters released an



AN EAST L.A. WOLF CAN SURVIVE

Los Lobos (which translates to “the Wolves”) combined Mexican music with blues, country, rhythm & blues, and zydeco, and were a key band to emerge on the L.A. roots-music scene. They found a new audience when embraced by the L.A. punk-rock community, sharing bills with the Blasters and X. The band came together in 1973 when David Hidalgo and Louie Pérez bonded over their eclectic musical tastes as students at Garfield High School in East Los Angeles and recruited fellow students Francisco Gonzales, Conrad Lozano, and Cesar Rosas to join them. Gonzales left in 1976, and saxophonist Steve Berlin joined in 1984. They are still going strong today.

These instruments have been extensively used by Los Lobos.

OPPOSITE PAGE, FROM LEFT:

Conrad Lozano’s 1973 Fender Telecaster bass

Cesar Rosas’s bajo sexto, a traditional Mexican twelve-string guitar

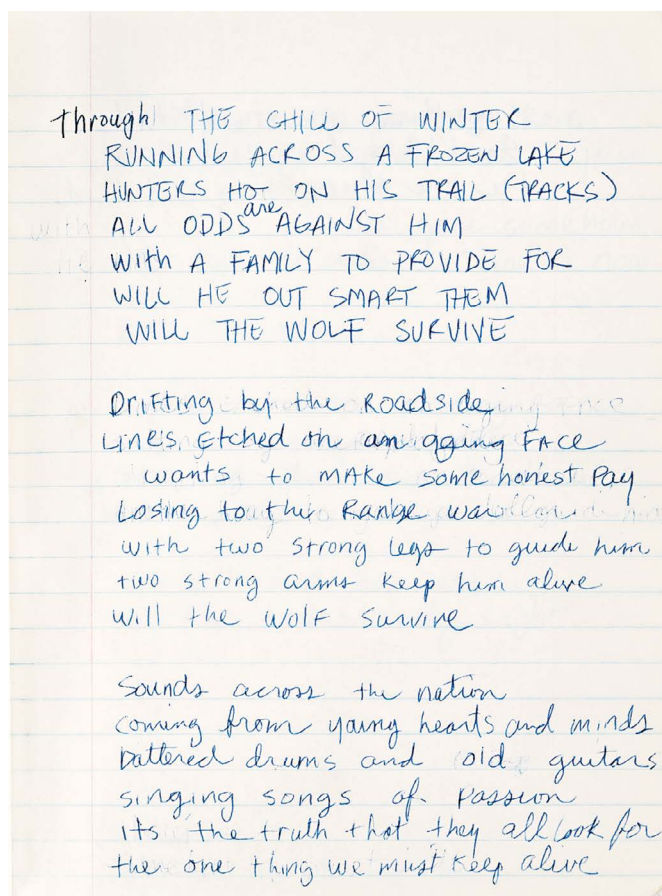
Delgado jarana jarocho custom built for Louie Pérez by Candelario “Candelas” Delgado in the 1970s. The eight-string, guitar-shaped instrument originated in Veracruz, Mexico.

David Hidalgo’s Hohner Panther accordion

RIGHT: Steve Berlin’s Unison S400 tenor saxophone and sticker-covered case

ARTIFACTS COURTESY OF LOS LOBOS





Los Lobos at Cathay De Grande, Los Angeles, 1982
 FROM LEFT: Cesar Rosas, Conrad Lozano, Louie Pérez, Steve Berlin,
 and David Hidalgo. PHOTO BY JOEL APARICIO

Ray-Ban sunglasses worn by Cesar Rosas

Louie Pérez's handwritten lyrics to the title track of Los Lobos' 1984 album, *How Will the Wolf Survive?*

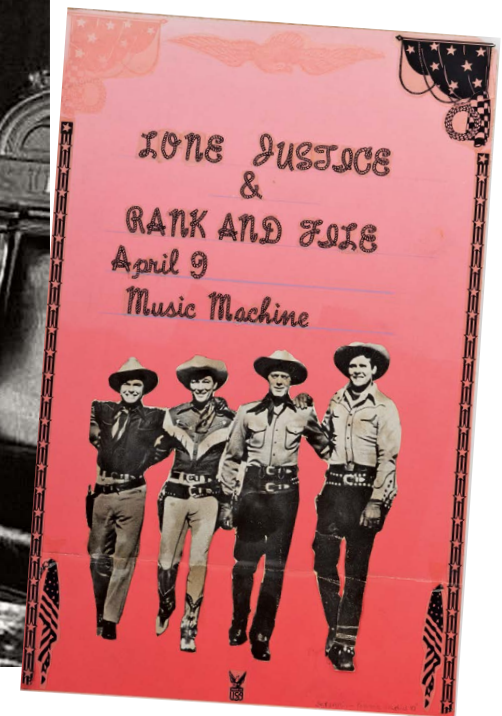
ARTIFACTS COURTESY OF LOS LOBOS

OPPOSITE PAGE: Rank and File at Tuts nightclub, Chicago, Illinois, May 7, 1983. FROM LEFT: Tony Kinman, Chip Kinman, Alejandro Escovedo, and Slim Evans

PHOTO BY PAUL NATKIN

Lone Justice's first drummer, Don Willens, designed this flyer promoting the band's show with Rank and File at the Music Machine, Los Angeles, April 9, 1983.

ARTIFACT COURTESY OF RYAN HEDGEcock



energetically charged acoustic album, *Poor Little Critter in the Road*, in 1985, recording songs by Merle Haggard, Helen Carter, Alton Delmore, and Leadbelly alongside several original numbers. Two decades later they reunited for a follow-up, *The Modern Sounds of the Knitters*, with another eclectic and earthy batch of performances.

The Dils, a punk group out of San Diego, was another act whose members quickly outgrew the stylistic limitations of punk rock. “There were louder and faster bands who were pushing even farther into punk,” said singer and bassist Tony Kinman, who plied Hollywood clubs before defecting to Austin to form pioneering cowpunk

band Rank and File with his brother, Chip. “That wasn’t the kind of music we were interested in anymore. It was frustrating to write songs for a punk audience that didn’t like them.”

Another audience, however, loved them. When the long-estranged Everly Brothers reunited in the 1980s, their Dave Edmunds-produced album *Born Yesterday* opened with Rank and File’s “Amanda Ruth.”

For a time, it appeared that the Next Big Thing out of L.A. might be roots-rock band Lone Justice, fronted by charismatic singer-songwriter Maria McKee. They signed

CONTINUED ON PAGE 120

1980s ROOTS-ROCK: HOW I GOT TO THE MIDDLE OF IT ALL

BY DAVE ALVIN

In 1977, I was a twenty-one-year-old fry cook who had concluded that music and whatever dreams I may have once had about a life playing music were dead and gone. Rock & roll had dumped the roll from its name and moved into soulless, corporate sports arenas. Due to tight and bland programming formats, neither AM nor even FM radio were the exciting, pioneering forces they had once been. Worst of all for me was that the Ash Grove nightclub—where my older brother Phil and I had been blessed to see countless blues, folk, and bluegrass giants perform when we were teenagers—had burned down four years earlier.

The closing of the Ash Grove crippled the once vibrant, eclectic roots music scene in Southern California, and I had never really gotten over that loss. But then one night in 1977, I saw a national TV news program about this new band in England called the Sex Pistols and this new music called punk rock. After that, my life was never the same.

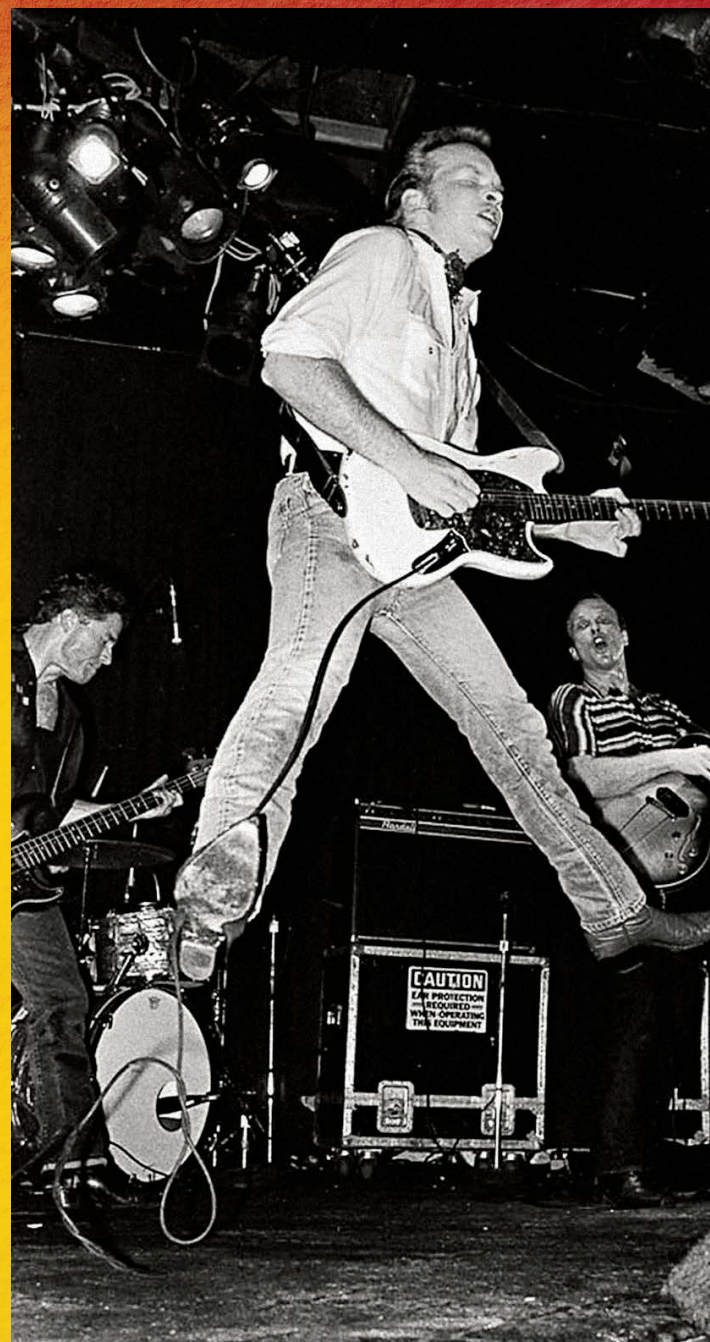


Suddenly rock music was exciting, wild, and a bit dangerous again. For some time, I'd been feeling like a defeated old man who would probably remain a fry cook forever, but then I heard the news reporter say that Johnny Rotten, the brash, young, loudmouth leader of the Sex Pistols, was twenty-one years old. I felt like a bucket of ice-cold water had been thrown in my face. Johnny Rotten and I were exactly the same age!

There was also the liberating fact that the Sex Pistols weren't very proficient on their instruments because, at that time, neither was I. Their disregard for musical virtuosity got me thinking that I should get over my shyness about my often-clumsy guitar playing and get out in the world and make some loud, glorious noise.

There was one problem, however. I grew up listening to and loving blues, folk, country, old rock & roll, and early jazz, but none of those roots music styles were represented much at that time in the British punk/new wave sounds. There were touches of raw rockabilly in early punk rock, though. I knew rockabilly was a wild mixture of blues and country that valued emotion over technique, so I figured that was where I could start trying to reconcile my love of roots music with the energy and abandon of punk rock.

In those days, I sported a scraggly beard and a nondescript 1970s haircut, but neither of those fit the tough,



The Blasters in action, early 1980s
FROM LEFT: Dave Alvin, Bill Bazz, and Phil Alvin

OPPOSITE PAGE: Leather jacket worn by Dave Alvin onstage with the Blasters in the early 1980s

ARTIFACT COURTESY OF DAVE ALVIN

in-your-face style of punk rock, so I'd have to change my look somehow. I soon shaved my patchy beard, donned a beat-up leather jacket, started combing my hair into a tall pompadour, and quit my job as a fry cook. I have never looked back.

Fortunately for me, my brother Phil was feeling the same way. He and I had always shared a passion for old American music, but I had never been good enough to be a member of the excellent blues and R&B bands that

he'd been leading since he was fifteen years old. This time, though, seemed like the right moment for us to finally start a band together.

Phil and I had a common background in music. Growing up in 1950s-1960s California, he and I could soak up just about every kind of American music anyone could desire. Around our parents' house, we were exposed to Bing Crosby, Nat King Cole, and swing-era big bands, plus my father's favorite, polka music, while on the



This sticker-covered road case for Dave Alvin's 1964 Fender Mustang reflects his love of old blues, country, and other roots music.

ARTIFACT COURTESY OF DAVE ALVIN

rock & roll radio stations, we were thrilled by Elvis, Fats Domino, doo-wop, and Chuck Berry.

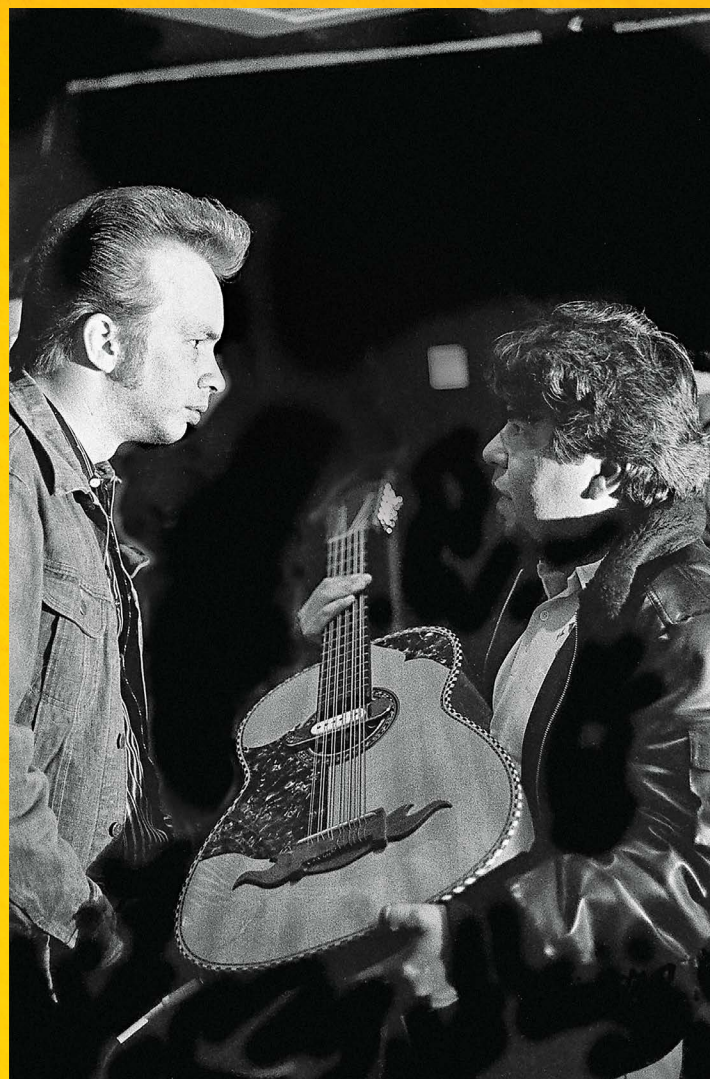
On local TV, we watched West Coast country music shows like *Melody Ranch* (hosted by Billy Mize and Johnny Bond), *Town Hall Party* (which featured greats like Joe Maphis, Merle Travis, Marty Robbins, and Johnny Cash as well as rockabilly legends like Eddie Cochran and Gene Vincent), and the early *Buck Owens Show*, which showcased young Bakersfield performers like Buck, Merle Haggard, and Wynn Stewart.

Late at night after bedtime, we'd lie in bed and surreptitiously tune our transistor radio to the powerful border radio stations that played doo-wop, norteño, blues, gospel, and country through the wee hours across western North America. Thanks to the influence of our older cousins' taste in music, my brother and I became obsessed with rhythm & blues, folk, honky-tonk songs, vintage jazz, surf, western swing, garage rock, and underground rock before we were even teenagers. By the time I was thirteen, Phil and I were sneaking into local blues dives and nightclubs like the Ash Grove to see,

TOP: Dave Alvin with Cesar Rosas of Los Lobos at Club 88, Los Angeles, 1981

BOTTOM: Phil Alvin with David Hidalgo of Los Lobos, 1981

PHOTOS BY JOEL APARICIO





Dave Alvin (center), the Long Ryders' Greg Sowders (left) and Sid Griffin, with some of their favorite albums, c. 1984

PHOTO BY ROBBIN KOHN / COURTESY OF GREG SOWDERS

follow around, pester, and learn from legendary blues artists like Big Joe Turner, T-Bone Walker, and Lightnin' Hopkins. Because of all these influences, we decided our band, the Blasters, would mix all those music styles together with the fierce energy of punk rock and see what we came up with. To us, no matter the style or genre, it was all just American music.

I can't lie and say the Blasters were lovingly embraced by everyone when we finally started getting gigs in the punk joints. My old Fender Mustang guitar still has shattered glass imbedded in it from beer bottles thrown by disgruntled punk audience members who didn't think we belonged there. We were, however, warmly welcomed to the party by many of the local, popular cutting-edge

bands, like X, the Go-Gos, and the Plimsouls, who helped us score important shows in big-time clubs like the Starwood and the Whiskey.

I was also pleasantly surprised to find more than a few folks like me who had grown up at the Ash Grove. Even though most of the music in this punk and roots scene was very different than what we grew up with, through it we rediscovered the kind of bohemian music community that the Ash Grove had once given us. With that sense of community in mind, once we were selling out shows on our own and had a record deal on Slash/Warner Brothers, we would help up-and-coming bands and artists who were trying to break into the scene and who shared similar musical roots—such as Los Lobos, Dwight Yoakam, Lone Justice, and Rank and File—by getting them on shows with us or enthusiastically pitching them to our record label. As I was to learn the hard way later in my career, the Los Angeles music scene was unusual in that, unlike a lot of the outside music world, the musicians on that scene actually looked out for and took care of each other.

It was a wild, intense, and strange time. A lot of very talented roots and rock musicians and singers came out of that scene who have since gone on to great acclaim and have made some of the best music of the past forty years. For me, I'm just happy that I didn't spend my whole life as a fry cook. Ω



Ash Grove flyer promoting shows by blues, folk, and bluegrass artists that Dave and Phil Alvin might have seen in the late 1960s

ARTIFACT COURTESY OF FRED ARONOW

Cowboy-print bandana worn by Dave Alvin with the Blasters

ARTIFACT COURTESY OF DAVE ALVIN



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 113

to red-hot Geffen Records and were shepherded by superstar producer Jimmy Iovine. But the group's 1985 major-label debut album failed to put across the band's live energy and stalled at #56 in *Billboard*; the follow-up, *Shelter*, only reached #65, and before long, the disillusioned group disbanded.

But in a sign of the changing times, Yoakam became a top album seller, and Williams, Flores, Hiatt, and Lauderdale eventually moved to Nashville. Several landed record deals during a window of receptivity to innovative music that critically acclaimed Texas singer-songwriter Steve Earle, another beneficiary, has called Music City's "Great Credibility Scare of the '80s." They were joined in Nashville by other émigrés from L.A.—like Rosanne Cash, Rodney Crowell, Vince Gill, the Sweethearts of the Rodeo, and Emmylou Harris—who believed at that time they belonged in mainstream country music.

Lone Justice, 1984. FROM LEFT: Ryan Hedgecock, Maria McKee, Don Heffington, and Marvin Etzioni

PHOTO BY DENNIS KEELEY / COURTESY OF RYAN HEDGECOCK

The Long Ryders with Gene Clark, backstage at McCabe's Guitar Shop, Santa Monica, August 10, 1984. FROM LEFT: Stephen McCarthy, Tom Stevens, Clark, Sid Griffin, and Greg Sowders

PHOTO BY GARY NICHAMIN / COURTESY OF GREG SOWDERS

Lucinda Williams at the Palomino Club, North Hollywood, 1985

PHOTO BY JASPER DAILEY





THE KNITTERS AT THE PALACE 11.17.84 HOLLYWOOD, CA

The Knitters backstage at the Palace, Los Angeles, November 1984

FROM LEFT: Dave Alvin, John Doe, Jonny Ray Bartel, Exene Cervenka, and D.J. Bonebrake. PHOTO BY GARY LEONARD

Chris Hillman, meanwhile, finally stepped front and center in the Desert Rose Band, which emerged out of a call from Dan Fogelberg. He had recorded a bluegrass album, *High Country Snows*, in 1985, and invited Hillman, Pedersen, multi-instrumentalist John Jorgenson, and bassist Bill Bryson to open for him and back him during his own show for a segment spotlighting the material.

Jorgenson began lobbying Hillman to start a new electric country band with the same musicians. With the addition of steel player JayDee Maness and drummer Steve Duncan, the Desert Rose Band was born. A stream of DRB hits helped brighten country radio playlists over the next half-dozen years. All the while, Hillman rejected urgings to move to Nashville, preferring to remain based in L.A.



Rosie Flores, c. 1987

PHOTO COURTESY OF ROSIE FLORES

Rosie Flores used this 1985 Fender Telecaster, with a Bigsby tailpiece, when she was in the Screamin' Sirens, an all-female band based in Los Angeles in the 1980s.

ARTIFACT COURTESY OF ROSIE FLORES

OPPOSITE PAGE: The Desert Rose Band, 1988

FROM LEFT: John Jorgenson, Steve Duncan, Bill Bryson, Chris Hillman, JayDee Maness, and Herb Pedersen

PHOTO BY BARRY FEINSTEIN / COURTESY OF CHRIS HILLMAN





“I’ll never forget a compliment I got from Jimmy Capps, who was a staff guitar player at the [Opry],” Pedersen said recently, recalling an incident from decades earlier.

“He said to me, ‘When you and Chris came down here and played the Opry a few nights ago, [he said,] ‘It’s funny that it would take two guys from California to show Nashville what country music is supposed to sound like.’ And I thought, ‘Wow, high praise indeed.’ “

Yet while this energetic musical microclimate was flourishing in L.A., pop music in general was moving away from the country-rock sound that flourished in the ’70s. The popularity of computer programmed, beat-driven dance music by English acts such as Duran Duran, Wham!, and others surged. Prince, Michael Jackson, and Madonna led a stateside migration away from softer textures of L.A. country-rock toward music targeting discos.



In metropolitan music centers such as L.A. and New York, momentum shifted from styles that yielded so much studio work and industry success during the previous decade-plus. Session players and other music industry stalwarts either switched gears musically, or simply moved to Nashville, where the Urban Cowboy phase in country music was giving way to New Traditionalists such as Randy Travis, Ricky Skaggs, Reba McEntire, the Judds, Keith Whitley, and others who served up a root-sier brand of country—much of it carrying forward the

sounds introduced to rock listeners by the Eagles, Ronstadt, the Byrds, and the Flying Burrito Brothers.

Soon, yet another generation of country stars including Vince Gill, Diamond Rio, Martina McBride, Trisha Yearwood, Faith Hill, Pam Tillis, Patty Loveless, and Kathy Mattea began to rise, influenced as much or more by '70s acts such as the Eagles and Linda Ronstadt as they may have been by Merle Haggard, Dolly Parton, Johnny Cash, and Hank Williams. Likewise, several successful country bands also emerged in the '80s that showed more influence from the Eagles and country-rock than from traditional country harmony groups like the Statler Brothers and the Oak Ridge Boys. These bands included Alabama, Exile, Restless Heart, and Highway 101. Alabama became one of mainstream country's powerhouses in the '80s and '90s largely using a vocal and instrumental template created by the Byrds, the Burritos, and the Eagles.

Garth Brooks, the biggest country star of the '90s, has always acknowledged his debt to the music of James Taylor, the Eagles, Jackson Browne, and others who personified Southern California music of the '70s.

In one more ironic twist, as a new century approached, the sound that once helped define Los Angeles became central to the music out of Nashville for the next couple of decades. Ω



Chris Hillman's Manuel jacket with rhinestones and embroidered roses

ARTIFACT COURTESY OF CHRIS HILLMAN

OPPOSITE PAGE: John Jorgenson played this 1967 Rickenbacker 450-12 twelve-string electric guitar, with custom turquoise finish and gold anodized pickguard, with the Desert Rose Band.

ARTIFACT COURTESY OF JOHN JORGENSON

John Jorgenson and Chris Hillman of the Desert Rose Band, 1987

PHOTO BY DIANE CURRY / COURTESY OF CHRIS HILLMAN

CONTRIBUTORS

LINDA RONSTADT has received twelve Grammy Awards, two Academy of Country Music Awards, and one Emmy Award, as well as several Tony and Golden Globe nominations. Her autobiography, *Simple Dreams: A Musical Memoir*, was published in 2013.

RANDY LEWIS covered popular music, with an emphasis on country music and roots-rock, for the *Los Angeles Times* from 1981 to 2020. He was named entertainment journalist of the year at the 2016 National Arts & Entertainment Journalism Awards and 2019 print journalist of the year by the Los Angeles Press Club.

HOLLY GEORGE-WARREN is the award-winning author of sixteen books, including *Janis: Her Life and Music*, a biography of Janis Joplin, and *Public Cowboy No. 1: The Life and Times of Gene Autry*.

MARY KATHERINE ALDIN is a reissue record producer and annotator. For the past forty-five years, she has hosted traditional music radio shows on KPFK-Los Angeles. She is a member of the Folk DJ Hall of Fame and the Blues Hall of Fame.

JAMES AUSTIN is a former producer and former vice president of A&R at Rhino Records. He won a Grammy in 2005 for the movie soundtrack *Ray*. He specializes in projects documenting the roots of American music.

ALISON BROWN is a Grammy-winning banjo player and co-founder of the Nashville-based roots label Compass Records. She was the first woman ever to receive an Instrumentalist of the Year award from the International Bluegrass Music Association.

STEVE FISHELL, a pedal steel guitarist and Grammy-winning record producer, is the author of *Buddy Emmons: Steel Guitar Icon*, a biography of the pedal steel innovator.

DAVE ALVIN is a Grammy-winning singer, songwriter, guitarist, and producer. He was a founding member of the Blasters and also performed as a member of X and the Knitters. He is the author of the recently released collection of poems, essays, and lyrics titled *New Highway*.

OPPOSITE PAGE: This Nudie suit was designed for Jon Corneal, the drummer with the Flying Burrito Brothers when they went to Nudie's Rodeo Tailors in late 1968 to order flashy stage wear. Corneal played on the group's debut album, *The Gilded Palace of Sin*, but left the band before the photoshoot for the LP cover. The embroidered motifs on the suit represent Corneal's home state of Florida.

ARTIFACT COURTESY OF JON CORNEAL



RECOMMENDED READING



Worn onstage by Emmylou Harris, Linda Ronstadt, and Rosie Flores, this sequined vest was designed by Nudie's Rodeo Tailors for actress Gail Davis. She never retrieved it from Nudie's shop, where Harris purchased the vest in the early 1970s, and later gave it to Flores. ARTIFACT COURTESY OF ROSIE FLORES

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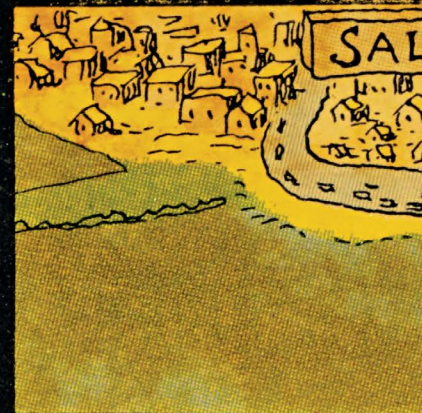
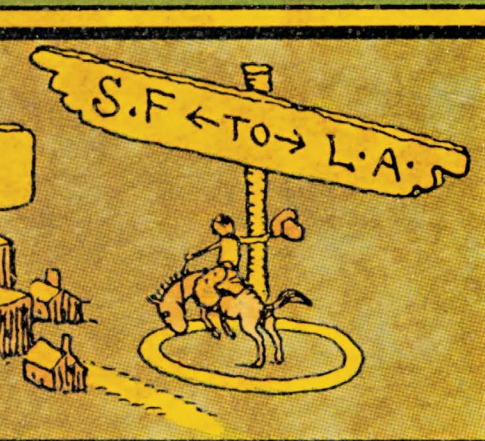
Jerry B. Williams



In 1985, Lone Justice visited the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum at its original location on Nashville's Music Row.

FROM LEFT: Don Heffington, Ryan Hedgecock, Maria McKee, Tony Gilkyson, and Marvin Etzioni

PHOTO BY ALAN L. MAYOR



WESTERN EDGE

The Roots and Reverberations of Los Angeles Country-Rock

Beginning in the sixties, musicians in Los Angeles adopted elements of folk, bluegrass, and country to reinvigorate the sounds of pop and rock. The music they created altered the course of both rock and country music. This book, a companion to a major multi-year exhibition at the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, traces the impact of the Byrds, Buffalo Springfield, the Eagles, Emmylou Harris, Linda Ronstadt, and many more, along with the next wave of L.A. roots music ushered in by the Blasters, Lone Justice, Los Lobos, Dwight Yoakam, and others. Revisit the western edge: where rock met country to produce sounds that reverberate to this day.

FOREWORD BY LINDA RONSTADT • MAIN ESSAY BY RANDY LEWIS

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