

## THE COUNTRY COLUMN

Putting an end to a persistent rumor, **Merle Haggard** sent a telegram a couple of weeks ago stating that he and wife/singing partner **Leona Williams** "are not divorcing each other, on record or off." Merle is also one of the many artists who will be appearing on **Ernest Tubb's** new double album, "Ernest Tubb: The Legend and The Legacy," due to be released Feb. 9, Tubb's 65th birthday. Merle will be singing on the cut "Seaman's Blues."

A group of Nashville artists gathered together Jan. 24 at the Exit/In to perform a benefit concert for fellow musician **Phillip Donnelly**, who came to the States about four years ago with **Donovan**. Awaiting the decision on a new work visa, guitarist Donnelly is presently being detained in Ireland by the United States Immigration Department. Among the artists appearing in the benefit were **Sammy Miller**, **Billy Burnett**, **Lee Clayton**, **Owen Cody**, **Townes Van Zandt** and **Guy Clark**. All proceeds from the show were donated to the effort to get Donnelly back into the United States.



Merle Haggard

**Bobby Goldsboro** has been set to appear at the Silverbird Hotel in Las Vegas Jan. 31-Feb. 13.

Tessier Talent of Madison, Tenn. will now be representing **Pee Wee King**, with **Redd Stewart** and the **Collins Sisters** for booking through their agency. And in association with **Johnny Paycheck's** Full House Talent, Tessier is also representing **Johnny Paycheck** for booking.

**Eddie Rabbitt** will become the first recording artist to be represented in the Country Music Walk of Fame. The Walk will be located adjacent to the Palomino Club in North Hollywood, one of the most important country music showcases on the west coast. A bronze plaque and a special ceremony marked the inauguration of the Walk of Fame on Feb. 1, which Los Angeles Mayor **Bradley** declared as "Country Music Day."

**Kenny Rogers** and **Dottie West** recently completed a second duet album at Jack Clement Recording Studios in Nashville. **Larry Butler** produced the sessions, with **Billy Sherrill** engineering. The United Artists album is scheduled for release in early March. Also in Jack Clement Studios were Hickory Records artist **Mickey Newbury**, who just completed an album. **Sonny James**, who began work on his first single for Monument Records, and **Arleen Harden**, who just finished a demo session with co-producers **Don Williams** and **Joe Allen**.

**Waylon Jennings** and the **Crickets** began an 18-date tour Feb. 2 at Florida State University.

Columbia's **Willie Nelson** will begin a series of tour dates in February that will take him to college and university campuses throughout the western United States, as well as other major venues. Beginning Feb. 10 at Stanford University in Palo Alto, Calif., Nelson will continue touring through the month and will appear at venues on the campuses of Arizona State University, Colorado State University, the University of Oklahoma and Wichita State University. Future appearances for Nelson include a role in the movie "Electric Horseman," which he completed filming recently with **Robert Redford**.

It's tough to turn 40, especially when your friends give you a souped up walker, complete with air horn, license plate and aerial bearing the big 4-0. **Ray Stevens** recently received such a gift from friends **Norro Wilson**, Warner Bros. A&R director, **Chet Atkins** and **Don Light**.

Recently **Peggy Sue** and **Sonny Wright** went into the studio to cut a new session for Door Knob Records. The session at Bradley's Barn was almost complete when Peggy's older sister, **Loretta Lynn**, dropped by to hear what Peggy had done. **Sissy Spacek**, the actress who will be portraying Loretta in the movie "Coal Miner's Daughter," was with Loretta. **Crystal Gayle**, Peggy and Loretta's sister, was supposed to sing some background harmony with Peggy Sue but she was detained by a snow storm in New York.

In what could turn out to be one of the most unusual "crossovers" in quite some time, **Porter Wagoner** unveiled his new disco show at the Exit/In last week in Nashville. With the addition of such touches as a synthesizer and a flashing disco light show, Porter's new act was quite a change in image.

"Change my image?" Porter quipped. "I'm putting on a few more rhinestones than normal. I've even had a hat made that's got them all over."

jennifer bohler



**MILSAP'S SURPRISE PARTY** — RCA staff members and Ronnie Milsap Enterprises surprised the RCA Records artist recently in his new studio and presented him with a birthday cake. Shown in the studio where Milsap was working on an upcoming LP (l-r) are: Joe Galante, RCA division vice president, marketing Nashville; Tom Collins, Milsap's co-producer; Bob Thompson, Milsap's manager; Milsap; Jerry Bradley, RCA division vice president, Nashville operation; and Dave Wheeler, RCA director of national country sales.

## Artists Honor Ernest Tubb

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First Generation and put out the 'Living Legend' album.

"Then Pete asked me to do some more numbers, and I recorded 10 more songs. About this time, Pete asked me what I thought about doing a record with Waylon Jennings. And he said Willie wants to do something with you. I told him I would, but it would have to be done my way with the Troubadours. Now, I have known both of them since they started in the business, and they are dear friends of mine. I said as long as we keep it country, I don't mind if they want to add different things with some of their musicians. Pete said, 'I will tell Waylon and Willie and see if we can work it out.'"

### 'Complete Surprise'

"Well, it never got done because we were never in town at the same time," Tubb added. "Then Pete said he wanted some more numbers because he wanted to put out a double album. I went in one night and recorded some more songs. Now, Pete had not said anything more about Waylon or Willie. Pete asked me to come back and listen to the tapes we had done, and he started playing one that I had done on a session two or three months earlier. It started off — 'Waltz Across Texas' — and here comes Willie singing with me. I said, 'What are you doing.' Directly, here comes another song and another with a guest artists on each one. It was a complete surprise to me. I thought I would cry to think of these people coming in and doing this. And they did it so I wouldn't find out about it. I didn't know a thing about it until it was almost done."

As an original country stylist, Tubb holds definite views on the subject of modern country music. He bears no grudge against any type of music, but believes it is dishonest for someone to claim to be a country artist and aim his music at the pop market. However, Willie Nelson is one country artist that Tubb thoroughly enjoys.

"I've been a Willie Nelson fan way back before some of these people who like him now," said Tubb, who shared a syndicated television show with Nelson in the middle '60s. "I was a Willie Nelson fan 20 years ago when he had 'Mr. Record Man' and those things out. I love almost everything he has ever done. I was invited to play on some of those picnics he started down in Texas, but I was already booked. Willie is as country as anybody. He did 'Blue Eyes Crying In The Rain' more country than Roy Acuff did it 25 years ago. I see nothing wrong with what Willie and Waylon are doing."

"What I object to is some of these people singing with a 30-piece orchestra, saying they are country entertainers. If you remember Ray Price's 'For The Good Times,' this, to me, is as far as you can go. This is what I call modern country music. It is a little on the pop side, but accepted by the country music fan. I say, let's make it better, but keep it country. Don't over-produce it and fill it full of gimmicks. If you can't go out onstage and perform it like it is on the record, then I think you are overdoing it."

"If someone asks me what is the difference between a country song and a pop song, I give them this example," added Tubb, who idolized the late Jimmie Rodgers and whose first hit, 'Walking The Floor Over You,' is recognized as an all-time classic country record. "Mainly, a pop song and especially a rock song is sold because of the melody or beat. The lyrics are not too important. But in country music, the lyrics are the main thing, and the song has a story that people can identify with. Now, as long as it's not filled with too many progressive chords, minor chords, jazz chords and rock licks, you can use any instruments. If the story is there, the song is there."

"I like all kinds of music," Tubb said. "I

say don't mix it all together. You can't take a country song and please a jazz fan, a rock 'n' roll fan and a country fan all at the same time. You are going to disappoint somebody. If a country record sells in the pop field, that's great. But if you are making it for the pop field, saying it's country, then I think you are cheating the public. You are not being honest with yourself. If you want to go pop, go pop. But don't try to make a pop record and say, 'Oh, I'm a country boy.'"

### Hectic Schedule

Tubb continues to maintain a travel schedule which would tax the strength of a much younger man — over 200 days on the road last year with a full schedule this year. But he is in good health, and he loves his work.

"I am doing what I want to do," Tubb said. "I would be lost otherwise. If I just stopped and sat down, I would go crazy. I'm not going to work up there in Ernest Tubb's record shop, and I'm not going to work in a publishing company or sit up in an office. I think traveling is what keeps me young."

Musicians can tell countless 'road' stories — both serious and humorous. But Tubb told of a letter he received a couple of months ago following an appearance in Iowa which is a simple, but effective illustration of why country music is a pure American art form which has reached the hearts and minds of this country for over 50 years.

### Fan Letter

"As many miles as I have traveled every year, I feel like I have shook hands with everybody who has ever listened to country music," Tubb said. "But I received this beautiful letter that I have marked for my scrapbook."

"Back in November, they had a bad snowstorm up in Iowa. Our last date in a Northwest tour was in a small town in Iowa, and that night there warnings not to get on the highway because of snow and ice. Believe it or not, we had over half the auditorium full of people. This is how the letter read:

"My husband and I came in the snow and ice to see you. He had been an Ernest Tubb fan all his life and has every record you ever made. We had always made plans to come see you over the years, but something always happened and we never made it. We just couldn't miss your show this time, so we got there. That was the greatest thing for us because our 13-year-old son is an Ernest Tubb fan, and he was with us. The sad thing I want to tell you is that after the show, when we got home, he complained that he was hurting in his chest. Four days later, he dropped dead of a heart attack. He was just 53. I am so proud that this will be the most memorable thing I have. At least, we all got to see Ernest Tubb before he died."

"To me, that letter was very touching," Tubb concluded. "I wrote her a sympathy card and thanked her for the very beautiful and touching letter. This meant something to that lady, and this is what country music means to me, not just making the dollar. I would have played for nothing if I had known it meant that much to her."

## Kahlenberg Appointed As Music City Comm. Sales Representative

NASHVILLE — Music City Communications, Inc. announced the appointment of Charles Kahlenberg to the position of sales representative. Kahlenberg comes to M.C.C. with an extensive background in industrial sales, marketing and manufacturing. Buddy Blake, president of Music City Communications, made the announcement citing Kahlenberg as an important addition to the M.C.C. staff in view of his additional experience in the music industry.