

COUNTRY



Three Women

The pioneers of "new country" include three women who sound even better than they look (if that's possible).

Linda Ronstadt has been the premier female vocalist in rock music since her 1974 album *Heart Like a Wheel* became the top-selling LP of the year, and her fans include a large dose of basic country listeners. With songs ranging from the pure country of Willie Nelson's "Crazy" to Rolling Stone rockers like "Tumbling Dice," Arizona-born Ronstadt has mastered (or mistressed) both forms.

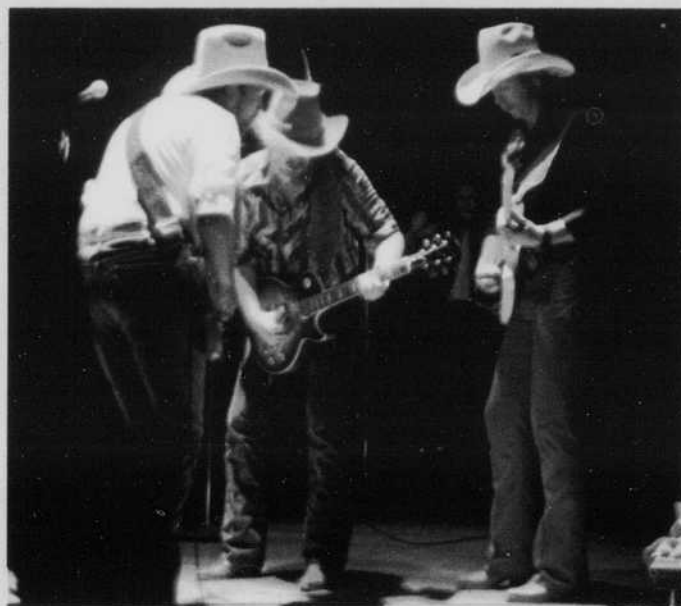
Emmylou Harris's hit singles have all been made on the country charts, but her influences and aspirations are on the rock side of country-rock. She was discovered singing in Washington, D.C. lounges in 1970 by the late Gram Parsons (of Byrds fame), and went on to build capital hits from progressive country songs as well as old country classics like "Together Again."

Dolly Parton, a buxom blonde singer from the Tennessee hills, rose to the top of the country field and then declared her musical independence in 1976 by firing her country band and breaking into the lucrative pop arena with an album she produced herself. This year she swept the pop, country and easy-listening charts with the single "Here You Come Again." No dumb blonde, this Dolly.

Ronstadt, Parton and Harris are all good friends. After years of backing each other on their albums, they've finally gotten together for a "trio" album. Move over, Crosby, Stills & Nash.

If skyrocketing sales of jazz albums have rock 'n rollers doing double takes at the pop charts, a glance at box office receipts sends them reelin'. Country sounds served up with a rock beat fill concert halls in the Seventies. Southern boogie groups like the Marshall Tucker Band can whip audiences into foot-stomping rapture with hard-driving rhythms on down-home tunes, while a mellow John Denver can convince laid-back crowds that West Virginia is "almost heaven." The Eagles, those good ol' boys from Los Angeles, plan to take their newfangled music out of the concert halls and into the movie theaters. They're hard at work on a film version of their landmark country-rock album, *Desperado*.

The successful sounds of these "new-comers" have not gone unnoticed by traditional country performers. Bluegrass king Earl Scruggs gained new fans by opening his acoustic band to electric instruments and strong rock rhythms. Nashville's Loretta Lynn opened the door for mass acceptance of the country singer, and sister Crystal Gayle walked right in without blinking her brown eyes. (Or are they blue?)



Marshall Tucker Band: Audiences dig country boogie

SOUND SAMPLER

Jimmy Buffett: *Changes in Latitudes, Changes in Attitudes* • **Charlie Daniels Band:** *Fire on the Mountain* • **Eagles:** *Desperado* • **Larry Gatlin:** *Love Is Just a Game* • **Emmylou Harris:** *Pieces of the Sky* • **Waylon Jennings:** *The Outlaws* • **Willie Nelson:** *Red Headed Stranger* • **Nitty Gritty Dirt Band:** *Will the Circle Be Unbroken* • **The Oak Ridge Boys:** *Y'all Come Back Saloon* • **Dolly Parton:** *Here You Come Again* • **Charlie Rich:** *Behind Closed Doors* • **Kenny Rogers:** *Lucille* • **Linda Ronstadt:** *Heart Like a Wheel* • **Marshall Tucker Band:** *Searchin' for a Rainbow* • **Jerry Jeff Walker:** *Viva Terlingua!*



The Outlaw

Waylon Jennings was a standard country singer until he bucked the Nashville establishment and crossed over into the pop music mainstream. He grew a beard, made his songs more thoughtful, and in the process founded an "outlaw" contingent of progressive country performers including Austin-based Willie Nelson and Jerry Jeff Walker. His most successful album is called, naturally, *The Outlaws*.

Laid-Back Sound

Until his recent hit, "Margaritaville," Jimmy Buffett's reputation was based on his live performances. The concerts feel more like living room gatherings than shows, and Buffett's Gulf Coast roots inject his mellow country tunes with a unique Caribbean flavor. This laid-back sound is winning over a large portion of the expanding country-rock audience.

Roots

The king of rock 'n roll was a country boy. **Elvis Presley's** earth-shattering music in 1956 combined the country sound of the Memphis "rockabillys" with a strong hit of black rhythm and blues. Country's pivotal role in this revolution quickly got lost in the shuffle. Rockers stuck it with a "hick music" tag. It took over 10 years for major performers to bring country back into the rock world. In 1968, Bob Dylan released *John Wesley Harding* and the Byrds followed with *Sweetheart of the Rodeo*. These popular albums



were true to the spirit of traditional country, and stimulated the rendezvous of modern rock with its country roots.