

CLASSIC COUNTRY

GREAT STORY SONGS



CLASSIC COUNTRY

GREAT STORY SONGS

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LIFE
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ES08-21
A2 52560



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4. **A WEEK IN A COUNTRY JAIL** TOM T. HALL
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PORTER WAGONER
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13. **SINK THE BISMARCK** JOHNNY HORTON
14. **DETROIT CITY** BOBBY BARE
15. **CONVOY** C. W. MCCALL

CLASSIC COUNTRY

GREAT STORY SONGS

DISC ONE



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DISC TWO

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10. THE WALL
11. TENNESSEE MUD
12. HARPER VALLEY P.T.A.
13. SINK THE BISMARCK
14. DETROIT CITY
15. CONVOY



JIMMY
DEAN

1 BIG BAD JOHN JIMMY DEAN

Music and lyrics by Jimmy Dean.

Columbia 42175 (1961) No. 1 (Country), No. 1 (Pop)

Acuff-Rose Music Inc. BMI. Originally released 1961 Sony Music Entertainment Inc.

With only three songs in hand for a recording date in Nashville, **JIMMY DEAN** desperately needed another tune for the session. Inspiration struck on the flight to Music City. Dean recalled a six-foot-five actor named John Mentoe with whom he had worked in summer stock. Jimmy relocated Mentoe to a mine and killed him off in the tragic tale of *Big Bad John*, which he wrote in an hour and a half.

2 THE BATTLE OF NEW ORLEANS JOHNNY HORTON

Music and lyrics by Jimmy Driftwood.

Columbia 41339 (1959) No. 1 (Country), No. 1 (Pop)

Warden Music Company Inc. BMI. Originally released 1959 Sony Music Entertainment Inc.

Giving an old fiddle tune new lyrics about Andrew Jackson's victory over the British in the War of 1812 yielded *The Battle of New Orleans*, the career-maker for **JOHNNY HORTON**. With its insistent marching beat, *New Orleans* became the preeminent saga song—a latter-day ballad about a real historical event. The single topped both the country and pop charts in 1959, and won Grammy Awards for Horton and songwriter Jimmy Driftwood.

3 WOLVERTON MOUNTAIN CLAUDE KING

Music and lyrics by Merle Kilgore and Claude King.

Columbia 42352 (1962) No. 1 (Country), No. 6 (Pop)

Painted Desert Music Corporation. BMI. Originally released 1962 Sony Music Entertainment Inc.

An arm injury, suffered at the University of Idaho, crushed the professional baseball dreams of **CLAUDE KING**. Back home in Shreveport, he focused his attention on music, making appearances on the *Louisiana Hayride* radio program and eventually getting a record contract with Columbia—thanks to another Bayou State star, Johnny Horton. *Wolverton Mountain*, King's third hit, pegged him as a saga singer, but he never again scaled to such heights on the charts.

4 A WEEK IN A COUNTRY JAIL TOM T. HALL

Music and lyrics by Tom T. Hall.

Mercury 72998 (1969) No. 1 (Country)

Unishappell Music Inc. BMI. Courtesy of PolyGram Records, Inc., Under license from Universal Music Special Markets, Inc.

"The Storyteller," **TOM T. HALL**, had a gift for boiling down an episode from his life into a compelling, three-minute single. *A Week in a Country Jail* recounted his brush with the law in a Kentucky hick town, where he was arrested for driving without a license. Since the judge was away, Hall did some jail time. This little incident paid off handsomely, when the song became Hall's first No. 1 hit as a solo artist.



TOM T.
HALL

5 **THE BALLAD OF JED CLAMPETT**
LESTER FLATT AND EARL SCRUGGS

Music and lyrics by Paul Henning.

Columbia 42606 (1962) No. 1 (Country), No. 44 (Pop)

CarolinTone Music Company Inc. BMI. Originally released 1962 Sony Music Entertainment Inc.

LESTER FLATT and **EARL SCRUGGS** felt a little uneasy about their association with the CBS hit comedy *The Beverly Hillbillies* because they had tried to distance themselves from the stereotypical hillbilly image. But *The Ballad of Jed Clampett*, the TV show's theme song, won the bluegrass duo a huge crossover audience and its first No. 1 hit. The two also appeared on the program, as themselves playing friends of the Clampetts.

6 **THE BLIZZARD** **JIM REEVES**

Music and lyrics by Harlan Howard.

RCA 7855 (1961) No. 4 (Country), No. 62 (Pop)

Red River Songs Inc./Sony/ATV Songs LLC. BMI. Originally recorded prior to 1972. All rights reserved by BMG Entertainment

"Crooner," not "storyteller," is the first word that comes to mind when describing the effortless vocal style of **JIM REEVES**. Yet with the Harlan Howard-penned *The Blizzard*, "Gentleman Jim" showed he could spin a sad Western tale with the best of them. The song followed close on the heels of *I Missed Me*, and was the last in a string of Top 10 Reeves hits that had started with *He'll Have to Go*.

7 **SAGINAW, MICHIGAN** **LEFTY FRIZZELL**

Music and lyrics by Bill Anderson and Don Wayne.

Columbia 42924 (1964) No. 1 (Country), No. 85 (Pop)

Sony/ATV Songs LLC. BMI. Originally released 1963 Sony Music Entertainment Inc.

The saga-song phenomenon was on the wane and folk-country music was flourishing when **LEFTY FRIZZELL** scored his first No. 1 hit in more than 12 years with *Saginaw, Michigan*. Co-writer and toolmaker Don Wayne decided on the title after seeing the town's name day after day in his workroom on a box from a Saginaw company. Wayne showed the song to Bill Anderson who added the surprise ending.

8 **THE CARROLL COUNTY ACCIDENT** **PORTER WAGONER**

Music and lyrics by Bob Ferguson.

RCA 9651 (1968) No. 2 (Country), No. 92 (Pop)

Warden Music Company Inc. BMI. Originally recorded prior to 1972. All rights reserved by BMG Entertainment

Courtesy of The RCA Records Label/Nashville. Under license from BMG Special Products

Thanks to his nationally syndicated TV program, the rhinestone-studded, pompadoured **PORTER WAGONER** had a prime-time audience for which he could audition new material as well as play his hits. Sorrowful tales often arrived via such hit concept albums as *The Cold*



**LEFTY
FRIZZELL**

Hard Facts of Life and *The Bottom of the Bottle*. **The Carroll County Accident**, from the LP of the same name, took CMA Song of the Year honors for 1969.

9 CROSS THE BRAZOS AT WACO BILLY WALKER

Music and lyrics by Kay Arnold.

Columbia 43120 (1964) No. 7 (Country), No. 128 (Pop)

Painted Desert Music Corporation. BMI. Originally released 1964 Sony Music Entertainment Inc.

Call Texan **BILLY WALKER** fortunate or just plain lucky. He saw Hank Williams's last show, and barely missed boarding the plane that crashed and took the lives of Patsy Cline, Cowboy Copas and Hawkshaw Hawkins. Walker signed with Columbia in 1951 and recorded alongside Lefty Frizzell and Ray Price in Dallas. But it is the influence of Gene Autry, who first inspired Walker to pursue music, that stands out in *Cross the Brazos at Waco*.

10 MILLER'S CAVE BOBBY BARE

Music and lyrics by Jack H. Clement.

RCA 8294 (1964) No. 4 (Country), No. 33 (Pop)

Universal Songs of PolyGram International. BMI. Originally recorded prior to 1972. All rights reserved by BMG Entertainment

In 1960, Hank Snow scored the first hit with *Miller's Cave*, riding the saga-song fad high up the country charts. **BOBBY BARE** had been performing the tune in his live shows; and when he cut it, he achieved even better results. Bare's folk-country reading is less melodramatic than Snow's—avoiding the echo-heavy “in Miller's Cave” tagline—but both versions found modest success on the pop side.

11 BIG IRON MARTY ROBBINS

Music and lyrics by Marty Robbins.

Columbia 41589 (1968) No. 5 (Country), No. 26 (Pop)

Mariposa Music Inc./Unichappell Music Inc. BMI. Originally released 1959 Sony Music Entertainment Inc.

MARTY ROBBINS had landed bit roles in two cowboy movies and seen his version of the theme from the Gary Cooper Western *The Hanging Tree* make the charts, before he arrived at his April 1959 session with a batch of songs for a concept album. The platinum-selling *Gunfighter Ballads and Trail Songs* included *Big Iron*, a Robbins original about an Arizona (Marty's home state) ranger who guns down the notorious Texas Red.

12 B.J. THE D.J. STONEWALL JACKSON

Music and lyrics by Hugh Lewis.

Columbia 42889 (1963) No. 1 (Country)

Universal Cedarwood Publishing. BMI. Originally released 1963 Sony Music Entertainment Inc.

When *Waterloo* broke out in 1959, **STONEWALL JACKSON**, who claims family ties to the famous Confederate general, acquired his signature song, the crossover smash that got him an appearance on Dick Clark's *American Bandstand*. **B.J. the D.J.** also hit No. 1, a beneficiary of good



MARTY
ROBBINS

timing—the single was released before the annual disc jockey convention in 1963, Jackson more or less owned the event after the receptive jocks had been playing his record constantly.



JOHNNY
HORTON

13 WHEN IT'S SPRINGTIME IN ALASKA (IT'S FORTY BELOW)

JOHNNY HORTON

Music and lyrics by Tillman Franks and Johnny Horton.

Columbia 41388 (1959) No. 1 (Country)

Universal Cedarwood Publishing. BMI. Originally released 1959 Sony Music Entertainment Inc.

While he is best-known as a purveyor of saga songs, **JOHNNY HORTON** had been a Western balladeer and a rockabilly singer before becoming a storyteller. His career was fading in the late '50s when manager Tillman Franks brought him the folk-oriented *When It's Springtime in Alaska (It's Forty Below)*. The song gave Horton his first No. 1 record and knocked *Don't Take Your Guns to Town*, by his labelmate and fishing buddy Johnny Cash, from the top spot.

14 DON'T TAKE YOUR GUNS TO TOWN

JOHNNY CASH

Music and lyrics by Johnny Cash.

Columbia 41313 (1959) No. 1 (Country), No. 32 (Pop)

Anne-Rachel Music Corporation. ASCAP. Originally released 1958 Sony Music Entertainment Inc.

Saga songs had grown so popular that in 1959 *Newsweek* remarked, "History's a hit." **JOHNNY CASH's** first venture into this area, *Don't Take Your Guns to Town*, arose, in part, from his abiding interest in the Old West. The record gave Cash his first No. 1 hit for Columbia and marked the beginning of a series of Western-themed singles and albums he would release in the '60s.

15 THE DEVIL WENT DOWN TO GEORGIA

THE CHARLIE DANIELS BAND

Music and lyrics by John Thomas Crain, Charlie Daniels, William DiGregorio, Fred Edwards, Charles Hayward and James Marshall.

Epic 59700 (1979) No. 1 (Country), No. 3 (Pop)

Songs of Universal Inc. BMI. ©1979 Sony Music Entertainment Inc.

Loud 'n' proud Southern rock made **THE CHARLIE DANIELS BAND** a popular fixture on the big-concert circuit. Yet instead of airing his usual geographical boasts or hippie concerns, Daniels partook of some traditional Southern storytelling on *The Devil Went Down to Georgia*, which combined old folk songs and Stephen Vincent Benét's poem *Mountain Whippoorwill* in a modern Faustian tale. Charlie and his band won a Grammy as well as the CMA Single of the Year award for 1979.

1 **TOM DOOLEY THE KINGSTON TRIO**

Music and lyrics by Frank Warner, John Lomax and Alan Lomax.

Capitol 4049 (1958) No. 1 (Pop)

Ludlow Music Inc. BMI. Courtesy Capitol Records; Under license from EMI-Capitol Music Special Markets

Perhaps it's a bit strong to say that **Tom Dooley** began the story song in country music, but the hit pop single certainly was a catalyst for the folk boom. This 1868 murder ballad was originally called *Tom Dula*, and **THE KINGSTON TRIO** first heard it performed by a singer auditioning for a gig at the Purple Onion in San Francisco. The success of *Tom Dooley* led to the restoration of Tom Dula's grave in North Carolina and plans for an official pardon.

2 **THE BALLAD OF THE GREEN BERETS**
SSGT BARRY SADLER

Music and lyrics by Robert Moore and Barry Sadler.

RCA 8739 (1966) No. 2 (Country), No. 1 (Pop)

Eastaboga Music Co. ASCAP. Originally recorded prior to 1972. All rights reserved by BMG Entertainment

With America divided over our involvement in Vietnam, **SSGT BARRY SADLER** spoke up for the Special Forces Army combat unit created by President Kennedy in 1961 with *The Ballad of the Green Berets*. Sadler won his beret and a tour of Vietnam, which was cut short after he was wounded by a poisoned punji stake in a booby trap. Back home, Sadler recorded his tribute for RCA, and it became the label's all-time fastest-selling single.

3 **OLD RIVERS WALTER BRENNAN**

Music and lyrics by Clifton Crofford.

Liberty 55436 (1967) No. 3 (Country), No. 5 (Pop)

Warner-Tamerlane Publishing Co. BMI. Courtesy Capitol Records; Under license from EMI-Capitol Music Special Markets

That lovable old coot Amos McCoy, portrayed by veteran character actor **WALTER BRENNAN** on the TV series *The Real McCoys*, could sure raise a ruckus, but he couldn't sing a lick. That didn't really matter for *Old Rivers*, a recitation about a farmer and his mule—previously declined by Johnny Cash and Eddy Arnold. The 67-year-old Brennan had his problems in the studio; he needed constant hand cues from songwriter Cliff Crofford to stay in tempo with the music.

4 **THE LONG BLACK VEIL LEFTY FRIZZELL**

Music and lyrics by Denny Dill and Marijoh Wilkin.

Columbia 41384 (1959) No. 6 (Country)

Universal Cedarwood Publishing, BMI. Originally released 1959 Sony Music Entertainment Inc.

Honky-tonk veteran **LEFTY FRIZZELL** had been out of the Top 10 for five years when *The Long Black Veil* bumped him up the charts in 1959. The song's lyrics were drawn from two real-life events—the murder of a New Jersey priest before 50 witnesses and the story of a mysterious, black-veiled woman who regularly visited the grave of Rudolph Valentino. Co-writer Marijoh Wilkin later helped out on the Jimmy Dean hit *P.T. 109*.



WALTER
BRENNAN



JOHNNY
CASH

5 **A BOY NAMED SUE** JOHNNY CASH

Music and lyrics by Shel Silverstein.

Columbia 44944 (1969) No. 1 (Country), No. 2 (Pop)

Evil Eye Music Inc. BMI. Originally released 1969 Sony Music Entertainment Inc.

The persona of the "Man in Black," **JOHNNY CASH**, made *A Boy Named Sue* seem all the more hilarious in the late '60s. Written by *Playboy* cartoonist Shel Silverstein, the song had been taken from the *Johnny Cash at San Quentin* album, and earned Cash and Silverstein Grammy Awards. An obscenity had to be bleeped from the song for the single to get airplay; for a time thereafter, Cash sang the bleep when performing *Sue*.

6 **NORTH TO ALASKA** JOHNNY HORTON

Music and lyrics by Tillman Franks and Johnny Horton.

Columbia 41782 (1960) No. 1 (Country), No. 4 (Pop)

EMI Hastings Catalog Inc. BMI. Originally released 1960 Sony Music Entertainment Inc.

In a very real sense, **JOHNNY HORTON** lived and died by the saga song. That is him performing *North to Alaska*, the title song of the 1960 movie starring John Wayne. Unfortunately, Horton never enjoyed the success of his hit single. The 35-year-old singer was killed in a head-on car crash just days before the record began its climb to No. 1.

7 **THE POOL SHARK** DAVE DUDLEY

Music and lyrics by Tom T. Hall.

Mercury 73029 (1970) No. 1 (Country)

Unichappell Music Inc. BMI. Courtesy of PolyGram Records, Inc., under license from Universal Music Special Markets, Inc.

As a champion of the working man, big **DAVE DUDLEY** pioneered trucking songs in the '60s, with such gear-jammer anthems as *Six Days on the Road* and *Truck Drivin' Son-of-a-Gun*. After a few Vietnam observations and a return to the highway, Dave scored his biggest hit ever with *The Pool Shark* in 1970. Cleaned out by the hustler, Dudley's character saves his last pitch for the waitress, who had repeatedly fueled him with shots of brandy.

8 **P.T. 109** JIMMY DEAN

Music and lyrics by Fred Burch and Marjahn Walkin.

Columbia 42338 (1962) No. 3 (Country), No. 8 (Pop)

Universal Cedarwood Publishing. BMI. Originally released 1961 Sony Music Entertainment Inc.

After a couple of spoken-word singles failed to deliver on the scale of *Big Bad John*, **JIMMY DEAN** cashed in on the current popularity and World War II heroism of President John F. Kennedy with *P.T. 109*. Producer Don Law, who had worked with Johnny Horton, gave the song the same military cadence heard in *The Battle of New Orleans*. The background singers sealed the deal with a "Big John" refrain before the fadeout.

9 EL PASO MARTY ROBBINS

Music and lyrics by Marty Robbins.

Columbia 41511 (1959) No. 1 (Country), No. 1 (Pop)

Marijosa Music Inc./Unichappell Music Inc. BMI. Originally released 1959 Sony Music Entertainment Inc.

The greatest saga song of 1959 belonged to **MARTY ROBBINS**, who as a kid dreamed of becoming a singing cowboy like Gene Autry. He wrote *El Paso* while driving through that city en route to Phoenix for Christmas in 1957. *El Paso* was more than four-and-a-half minutes long, and Columbia released it with an edited version on the flip side. The full-length version prevailed, topping both the country and pop charts, and securing Marty a Grammy.

10 THE WALL FREDDIE HART

Music and lyrics by Harlan Howard.

Columbia 41345 (1959) No. 24 (Country)

Red River Songs Inc./Universal Codarwood Publishing. BMI. Originally released 1959 Sony Music Entertainment Inc.

Songwriters don't always make the transition to being song interpreters, but **FREDDIE HART** was an exception. Some of his best efforts, such as *Loose Talk* (a No. 1 hit for Carl Smith in 1954) and *Skid Row Joe* (a big seller for Porter Wagoner) worked only for other artists. Conversely, *The Wall*, the tale of a convict's suicide masked as a failed jailbreak, gave Freddie his first chart record—courtesy of Harlan Howard.

11 TENNESSEE STUD EDDY ARNOLD

Music and lyrics by Jimmy Driftwood.

RCA 7542 (1959) No. 5 (Country), No. 48 (Pop)

Warden Music Company Inc. BMI. Originally recorded prior to 1972. All rights reserved by BMG Entertainment

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The smooth, easygoing sound of **EDDY ARNOLD** belies the difficulty he had with *Tennessee Stud*. RCA engineer Bill Porter claimed that it took Arnold 72 takes to get one of his vocal entrances right—a real headache for producer Chet Atkins. Arnold rode this Jimmy Driftwood classic into the Top 5, while Johnny Horton's recording of Driftwood's *The Battle of New Orleans* was burning up the charts.

12 HARPER VALLEY P.T.A. JEANNIE C. RILEY

Music and lyrics by Tom T. Hall.

Plantation 3 (1968) No. 1 (Country), No. 1 (Pop)

Unichappell Music Inc. BMI. Courtesy of Sun Entertainment

Like a character from a Tom T. Hall song—instead of the singer of a Tom T. Hall smash—**JEANNIE C. RILEY** was a true overnight sensation. A Music Row secretary who cut demos, hoping to get discovered, Riley nailed *Harper Valley P.T.A.* in one take. The record sold millions, she bought a purple Cadillac, did the major TV talk shows and won a Grammy. With his first royalty check, Hall purchased a car for his father.



EDDIE
ARNOLD

13 SINK THE BISMARCK JOHNNY HORTON

Music and lyrics by Tillman Franks and Johnny Horton.

Columbia 41568 (1960) No. 6 (Country), No. 3 (Pop)

Universal Cedarwood Publishing. BMI. Originally released 1960 Sony Music Entertainment Inc.

Each new release by **JOHNNY HORTON** further strengthened his position as king of the saga songs. He sailed into the '60s with a tune he and manager Tillman Franks composed, *Sink the Bismark*, which was based on the movie of the same title. With a superpatriotic fervor and sound reminiscent of *The Battle of New Orleans*, Horton sent the mighty German battleship to Davy Jones's locker—and himself into the Top 10.

14 DETROIT CITY BOBBY BARE

Music and lyrics by Danny Dill and Mel Tillis.

RCA 8183 (1963) No. 6 (Country), No. 16 (Pop)

Universal Cedarwood Publishing. BMI. Originally recorded prior to 1972. All rights reserved by BMG Entertainment

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As "Bill Parsons," **BOBBY BARE** became a rock 'n' roll one-hit wonder in 1958 with *The All American Boy*, an Elvis spoof. *Detroit City*, the story of a displaced Southerner working in the auto industry up north, first surfaced in 1962 as *I Wanna Go Home* by Billy Grammer. When Bobby heard it on his car radio, he nearly caused an accident and he decided to cut the song at his next RCA session.

15 CONVOY C. W. MCCALL

Music and lyrics by Louis F. Davis Jr. and William Fries.

MGM 14839 (1975) No. 1 (Country), No. 1 (Pop)

American Gramophone. SESAC. © 1975 Mercury Records, Inc.

Courtesy of Mercury/Nashville Records, Under license from Universal Music Special Markets

Iowa advertising exec Bill Fries, billed as **C. W. McCall**, put the "con" in *Convoy* when the song flew to the top of the charts and sold seven million copies. Fries had created the character C. W. McCall to sell bread for a client; it made him a lot of dough with the product tie-in craze of CB radios. Co-writer Louis F. (Chip) Davis Jr. later formed the immensely successful New Age group Mannheim Steamroller.



C. W.
MCCALL

—Charles McCardell



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