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## The Mid-'80s • Pure Gold

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THE MID-'80s • PURE GOLD

COMPACT  
disc  
DIGITAL AUDIO

CCD-07  
OPCD-2669

TIME  
LIFE  
MUSIC

1. Diggin' Up Bones 2. Let's Chase Each Other around the Room 3. She Sure Got Away with My Heart 4. I'll Never Stop Loving You 5. Whoever's in New England 6. High Horse 7. Desperado Love 8. Elizabeth 9. She's Single Again 10. Mona Lisa Lost Her Smile 11. Cry Again Last Night 12. Honky Tonk Man 13. Have Mercy 14. She's My Rock 15. I Fell in Love I Needed Tonight 16. She Keeps the Home Fires Burning 17. You're the Last Thing 18. Tennessee Homesick Blues 19. I Got Mexico 20. If You're Gonna Play in Texas Are Coming Over Tonight 21. All My Rowdy Friends 22. Old Hippie

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# CONTEMPORARY COUNTRY

## THE MID-'80s • PURE GOLD

Randy Travis—still going by his real name of Randy Traywick—arrived in Nashville from his native North Carolina in 1981. By 1985, Traywick was working as a cook, dishwasher and singer at Nashville Palace, his manager (and future wife) Lib Hatcher's nightclub near Opryland. Warner Brothers A&R chief Martha Sharp heard him there, and was impressed enough to sign him even though his hard-country style clashed with prevailing trends. After changing his last name to Travis, he cut a single called *On the Other Hand*, which did not do well. But the follow-up, 1982, went all the way to No. 6, so *On the Other Hand* was re-released and this time topped the country charts. **Diggin' Up Bones** soon followed it to the No. 1 spot.

*Diggin' Up Bones* was written by Paul Overstreet and Albert Gore (not the Tennessee Senator) after Thanksgiving dinner at Gore's house in 1985. The title and basic concept came from Overstreet, who had originally planned to record the song him-

self. Overstreet, one of Nashville's hottest songsmiths in the mid-'80s, also co-wrote (with Thom Schuyler) **I Fell in Love Again Last Night**, which enabled the Forester Sisters to become the first country all-female group to hit No. 1. Schuyler got the idea while contemplating the number of his friends whose marriages were falling apart, which in turn got him thinking about how important it was periodically to "fall in love again with the person you married." Shelly West cut the song first, but only as an album track, and the Foresters' faster arrangement made it more viable as a single.

A batch of new stars emerged in the mid-'80s, ending a long spell during which the records coming out of Nashville were criticized as being too similar. The mother-daughter duo the Judds was forging a formidable team with songwriter Paul Kennerley, a refugee from British advertising who moved to Nashville in 1983. After the Judds cut his *Cry Myself to Sleep*, he wrote **Have Mercy** to emphasize the R&B

side of the Judds' music. When producer Brent Maher played the demo to Naomi and Wynonna on their tour bus in Mississippi, they elected to cut it immediately and put it out before *Cry Myself to Sleep*. Kennerley wound up writing five of their '80s singles, including four No. 1 hits.

Dwight Yoakam, who began his career in the Los Angeles New Wave rock circuit, charted for the first time when he applied his Bakersfield bar-room sound to a remake of **Honky Tonk Man**, which had been the first top-40 single for the late Johnny Horton in 1956. Actor John Schneider, who had been recording since 1981 when he played Bo Duke on *The Dukes of Hazzard*, had a string of top-10 hits in the mid-'80s with material such as **You're the Last Thing I Needed Tonight**. The team of Don Pfrimmer and David Wills had written that song four or five years earlier in Pfrimmer's basement. George Jones and George Strait had already cut it, but both singers were unhappy with their recordings and declined to release them.

Pfrimmer also had a hand in **She Keeps the Home Fires Burning**, a hit for Nashville veteran Ronnie Milsap. Sensitive to complaints that the soulful Milsap had gone schlocky, producer Tommy Collins was seek-

ing out a straight-ahead country song when he came across this lyric by Pfrimmer that had no melody. Mike Reid and Dennis Morgan, meanwhile, had a melody Collins liked just fine, but they had no words. So the producer brought the three men to the studio and instructed them to meld the lyrics and melody while the star worked on other songs. Conway Twitty, another classic voice, scored his 40th country No. 1 with **Desperado Love**, from the pen of former pop singer-songwriter Sammy Johns. Johns wrote it during a streak of hard luck after losing his house. He was drinking beer and struggling to write *anything* that didn't sound as desperate as he felt, when he hit on the notion that he could have a desperate love for a woman more credibly than for a house. That got him through the first verse, and then Michael Garvin helped him finish.

Eddy Raven came to Nashville from Louisiana in 1970 as a songwriter, but progress as an artist was slow; he first charted in '74, and didn't hit the top 20 until '81. In 1983, he lost his record contract and took an 18-month hiatus to get his business affairs in order. During that time he wrote the escapist fantasy **I Got**

**Mexico** specifically to be his comeback single. Hank Williams Jr., who had been red-hot since the '70s, scored with a second song about his rowdy friends. The first had been 1981's mournful *All My Rowdy Friends (Have Settled Down)*. But some of those friends must have changed their ways because three years later Hank Jr. was exhorting **All My Rowdy Friends Are Coming Over Tonight** so gleefully that the song was adapted as the theme song for ABC's prime time *Monday Night Football*.

Two of country's living legends kept apace. George Jones remade **She's My Rock**, a 1972 hit for Stoney Edwards, a black country singer from Oklahoma. And Merle Haggard triumphed with **Let's Chase Each Other around the Room**, which he and his rhythm guitarist, Freddy Powers, co-wrote after Powers' girlfriend (who sang in the band) made a suggestive remark to him along those lines.

Alabama learned the truth behind **If You're Gonna Play in Texas (You Gotta Have a Fiddle in the Band)** the hard way. On its first tour through the Lone Star State, the band was chagrined to see the audience dance through the entire set instead of sitting and listening to the music. That, they were told, was a good sign, be-

cause Texans don't like country music they can't dance to. Dan Mitchell and Murry Kellum wrote a song to emphasize this point; it worked perfectly for Alabama, who already featured a fiddle break in most of their arrangements. The ever-traditional Statler Brothers arrived at **Elizabeth** after watching the film *Giant*, starring Elizabeth Taylor, James Dean and Rock Hudson, one night on the tour bus. New member Jimmy Fortune (the 1982 replacement for Lew DeWitt, who had left due to illness) named his song in honor of the heroine.

Speaking of movie heroines, Dolly Parton was doing her best to become one, too—but she was thwarted by her choice of vehicles. *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas* was already behind her when she signed on to do *Rhinestone* with Sylvester Stallone. The movie was based on songwriter Larry Weiss' *Rhinestone Cowboy* (a 1975 chart topper for Glen Campbell); however, with Stallone himself doing the singing, it seemed doomed to failure. That proved to be the case, even though Dolly wrote 13 of the movie's 14 songs, and got a No. 1 hit out of **Tennessee Homesick Blues**, an homage to the Smoky Mountains where she grew up. Crystal Gayle had finished cutting half an

album when she gave birth to her son Christos. While she was recuperating, it occurred to producer Jim Ed Norman that he had not included any of the bluesy torchers Gayle did so well. He immediately thought of Johnnie Ray's chestnut **Cry**, and had no trouble talking Gayle into recording it when she was ready to resume work.

In most respects, the mid-'80s belonged to Reba McEntire. She enjoyed her first chart record in 1976 and her first top-10 in 1980, but was on an uneven course until coming under the wings of producer Jimmy Bowen in 1984. **Whoever's in New England** was crucial among the slew of her mega-hits that quickly followed. McEntire's then-husband reportedly objected to her singing this apparent tale of infidelity, though she maintained that it was okay because there was really nothing amiss happening—the woman in the song was just imagining the affair. Whatever the interpretation, there's no denying that the real genius of Bowen and McEntire is that the tune enabled them to promote Reba as a country purist even as it moved her in a more pronounced pop direction.

—John Morthland

## DISCOGRAPHY

\*Indicates highest Billboard country chart position

- 1. Diggin' Up Bones** Randy Travis • Music and lyrics by Paul Overstreet and Albert Gore. *Lawyer's Daughter Music./Sawgrass Music Publ., Inc./Scarlet Moon Music./Writers Group Music.* BMI. Warner 28649 (1986). © 1986 Warner Bros. Records Inc. Produced under license from Warner Bros. Records Inc. No. 1\*
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*Reba McEntire*

