

A man wearing a light-colored cowboy hat and a white short-sleeved shirt is shown from the chest up. He is holding a guitar and singing into a vintage-style microphone. The background is dark, and the lighting is focused on him, creating a moody atmosphere. The overall image has a slightly grainy, high-contrast quality.

TIME
LIFE
MUSIC

CONTEMPORARY
COUNTRY

CONTEMPORARY COUNTRY

The Early '80s • Pure Gold

- 1. I Ain't Living Long Like This**
Waylon Jennings
- 2. Heartbroke** Ricky Skaggs
- 3. Fourteen Carat Mind** Gene Watson
- 4. I Always Get Lucky with You**
George Jones
- 5. All My Rowdy Friends (Have Settled Down)** Hank Williams Jr.
- 6. Can't Even Get the Blues**
Reba McEntire
- 7. Night Games** Charley Pride
- 8. My Heart** Ronnie Milsap
- 9. Pancho and Lefty**
Willie Nelson and Merle Haggard
- 10. The Closer You Get** Alabama
- 11. I Was Country When Country Wasn't Cool** Barbara Mandrell
- 12. Swingin'** John Anderson
- 13. I'd Love to Lay You Down**
Conway Twitty
- 14. Elvira** The Oak Ridge Boys
- 15. Somebody's Knockin'** Terri Gibbs
- 16. Good Ole Boys Like Me** Don Williams
- 17. Amarillo by Morning** George Strait
- 18. My Heroes Have Always Been Cowboys** Willie Nelson
- 19. I'm Gonna Hire a Wino to Decorate Our Home** David Frizzell
- 20. Thirty-Nine and Holding**
Jerry Lee Lewis
- 21. Blue Moon with Heartache**
Rosanne Cash
- 22. My Favorite Memory** Merle Haggard

SEE PROGRAM NOTES INSIDE

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CONTEMPORARY
COUNTRY
THE EARLY '80S • PURE GOLD

COMPACT
disc
DIGITAL AUDIO

CCD-09
MSD-35329

TIME
LIFE
MUSIC

1. I Ain't Living Long Like This
Lucky with You
7. Night Games
I Was Country When Country Wasn't Cool
Ole Boys Like Me
Always Been Cowboys
to Decorate Our Home
Holding
22. My Favorite Memory
2. Heartbroke
8. My Heart
14. Elvira
17. Amarillo by Morning
19. I'm Gonna Hire a Wino
20. Thirty-Nine and
3. Fourteen Carat Mind
9. Pancho and Lefty
15. Somebody's Knackin'
18. My Heroes Have
21. Blue Moon with Heartache
4. I Always Get
6. Can't Even Get the Blues
10. The Closer You Get
13. I'd Love
16. Good

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CONTEMPORARY COUNTRY

THE EARLY '80s • PURE GOLD

In 1980, Rodney Crowell and Waylon Jennings struck common ground on **Ain't Living Long Like This**. Though Jennings complained by the early '80s that his outlaw image limited him commercially, he leaped at the chance to record the Crowell composition with its references to shotguns and lawmen. Crowell wrote the song at home in Hermosa Beach, California, where he lived while working as a guitarist for Emmylou Harris. Halfway through the song, he actually landed in jail briefly—for violating local leash laws. The references to Wayside Drive were to a street along Houston's ship channel, where Crowell's grandfather was a night watchman who confronted rough-and-ready stevedores carousing in the district's bars.

In 1978, Crowell had managed a minor breakthrough as an artist with **Elvira**, which squeaked onto the charts at No. 95. Dallas Frazier, the Oklahoma-born, California-bred songwriter who bounced back and forth between

Nashville and Bakersfield/Hollywood, had written and recorded the song in the mid-'60s. Besides Crowell, eight artists, most prominently Kenny Rogers and the First Edition, remade *Elvira* before producer Ron Chancey took it to the Oak Ridge Boys. Bass singer Richard Sterban had been grumbling that the group neglected material that would spotlight his admittedly specialized talents, but after recording *Elvira*, he was happy. Frazier also wrote **Fourteen Carat Mind**, which Gene Watson discovered on a demo tape as his touring bus rolled toward a gig.

Though Crowell was a marginal artist in the early '80s, his wife, Rosanne Cash, proved a major success story. **Blue Moon with Heartache** was the third straight No. 1 off her *Seven Year Ache* album, which Crowell produced. Cash worked out the tune with bassist-arranger Emory Gordy in her L.A. living room. Cash would not say where the song came from, but the album was a loosely constructed song cycle about her relation-

ship with Crowell.

Several other Texas writers who got their feet in the door during the outlaw years were beginning to reap rewards in the early '80s. Ricky Skaggs'

Heartbroke came from the pen of Guy Clark, who referred to it as his "Chuck Berry tune." Unable to find anyone in L.A. who could get the fiddle part right, Clark flew Skaggs in from Nashville to help out. Though he claimed not to understand the lyrics, Skaggs was so impressed with the song that he vowed on the spot to record it himself when he got a label deal. By the time he made good several years later, George Strait and Crowell had both cut versions of it, but neither one was released as a single.

Pancho and Lefty was originally the calling card of Townes Van Zandt, who, like Clark, was a Houston singer-songwriter with ties to Nashville publishing houses. Willie Nelson and Merle Haggard learned it from Emmylou Harris's *Luxury Liner* LP, which Willie's daughter Lana brought to her dad's Pedernales Studios outside Austin. Nelson recorded the song as Haggard napped. Producer Chips Moman laid down the bridge after Willie and his usual

guitarist, Grady Martin, both found the guitar part too tricky. Haggard was then roused at 4 a.m. to do the last verse; he sang along to Willie's vocals because he thought there were too many words for him to remember.

Nashville's Sharon Vaughan wrote **My Heroes Have Always Been Cowboys** for inclusion on a Bobby Bare cowboy album, but when Bare passed on the song, Waylon Jennings included it on the epochal *The Outlaws* LP. Later, when Nelson got a part in the Robert Redford-Jane Fonda movie *The Electric Horseman*, Jennings suggested he cut it as the sound track's title song. Movie director Sydney Pollack coproduced, which explains how such instruments as harp and horns wound up on a Nelson hit.

Haggard wrote his **My Favorite Memory** about the time he and his wife, Leona Williams, were snowed in on his Lake Shasta, California, houseboat for 13 days, fishing and making snow ice cream while he missed his scheduled performances in Las Vegas. The song was on Hag's *Big City* LP, which indirectly provided George Jones with **I Always Get Lucky with You**. Haggard's guitarist Freddy Powers had

begun the song in 1978, and Merle helped him finish it for the recording sessions. Soon after, Haggard and Jones completed a duet album.

The Urban Cowboy fad peaked in the early '80s, and Barbara Mandrell's **I Was Country When Country Wasn't Cool** was written by Kye Fleming to one-up the singers jumping on the bandwagon. Though recorded in the studio, the song was the centerpiece of a Mandrell live album; George Jones overdubbed his part later, and audience noises were also added to the final mix.

Can't Even Get the Blues, Reba McEntire's first No. 1, was originally slated for Jacky Ward (a former McEntire duet partner) by producer Jerry Kennedy. McEntire talked Kennedy into letting her cut the song because she was so bored with singing ballads.

George Strait reinforced his Western image with the rodeo song **Amarillo by Morning**. Producers Norro Wilson and Blake Mevis tailored **Night Games** to Charley Pride's romantic image, and it brought the singer his 29th No. 1 country smash. Hank Williams Jr. name-dropped on **All My Rowdy Friends (Have Settled Down)**, which he described as one of

the easiest songs he ever wrote; he reprised the motif three years later with *All My Rowdy Friends Are Coming Over Tonight*. Similarly, Jerry Lee Lewis's **Thirty-Nine and Holding** recycled ideas from his 1977 *Middle Age Crazy*. John Anderson began **Swingin'**, his ode to small-town courtship, with his frequent collaborator Lionel Delmore (son of Alton Delmore, half of country's revered Delmore Brothers). But Anderson did not cut the song until he had relaxed on the studio floor and reworked certain sections. Alabama's **The Closer You Get** was lifted from the group Exile, stalled at the time in a netherworld between pop and country.

Don Williams' **Good Ole Boys Like Me** was a calculated literary effort from Bob McDill, who claimed that the song had been influenced by the Band. Ronnie Milsap chose **My Heart** for its similarities to *Back on My Mind Again*, his No. 2 hit from 1979—but *My Heart* not only surpassed its predecessor, it outdid *Silent Night (After the Fight)*, which Milsap figured would be the smash of the two-sided single. David Frizzell (Lefty's little brother) already maintained a duet career with Shelly West (Dottie's daughter) when he went solo with **I'm**

Gonna Hire a Wino to Decorate Our Home. He acquired the song after writer Dewayne Blackwell was unable to use it to launch his own country career.

Conway Twitty's **I'd Love to Lay You Down** came from Johnny MacRae after he and Bob Morrison were unable to craft something for Johnny Duncan, who, like Twitty, was known to like a suggestive song title. MacRae thought this one up in his car on the way home from an unproductive writing session, and finished it the next morning while jogging. And yes, it was controversial, but by now, thanks to *You've Never Been This Far Before* among other songs, Twitty was an old hand at this kind of thing. He calmly pointed out that the couple in the song had been married several years, then sat back and watched the debate over the sexy lyrics help carry him to the top of the charts—exactly what he had been doing for the previous decade.

—John Morthland

DISCOGRAPHY

*Indicates highest Billboard country chart position

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Creative Director: Robin Bray

Recording Producers: Joe Sasfy, Steve Carr

Product Management Director: Donna Pickett

Production Manager: Karen Hill

Special Contributor: Lynne O'Connor (text)

Art Studio: A Sexton Design

The Early '80s • Pure Gold was produced by Time-Life Music in cooperation with MCA Records, Inc. Digitally remastered at Hit and Run Studios, Rockville, Md.

The Author: John Morthland is the author of *The Best of Country Music* and is a contributing editor to *Country Music* magazine.

Time-Life Music wishes to thank Ken Johnson of WYRK in Buffalo, New York, for providing valuable reference material.

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Barbara Mandrell

