



TIME
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CONTEMPORARY
COUNTRY

CONTEMPORARY COUNTRY

The Late '80s = Pure Gold

1. *Streets of Bakersfield* Dwight Yoakam and Buck Owens
2. *Blue Side of Town* Patty Loveless
3. *I Couldn't Leave You If I Tried* Rodney Crowell
4. *The Way We Make a Broken Heart* Rosanne Cash
5. *Don't Close Your Eyes* Keith Whitley
6. *The Church on Cumberland Road* Shenandoah
7. *Darlene* T. Graham Brown
8. *Somewhere Tonight* Highway 101
9. *The Last One to Know* Reba McEntire
10. *Deeper Than the Holler* Randy Travis
11. *Living Proof* Ricky Van Shelton
12. *Barn to Boogie* Hank Williams Jr.
13. *This Crazy Love* Oak Ridge Boys
14. *New Shade of Blue* Southern Pacific
15. *Love Me Like You Used To* Tanya Tucker
16. *I Got Dreams* Steve Wariner
17. *Change of Heart* The Judds
18. *Song of the South* Alabama
19. *Do Ya'* K.T. Oslin
20. *I've Been Lookin'* The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band
22. *(I'd Choose) You Again* The Forester Sisters
23. *A Long Line of Love* Michael Martin Murphy

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CONTEMPORARY
COUNTRY
THE LATE '80s • PURE GOLD

COMPACT
disc
DIGITAL AUDIO

CCD-11
OPCD-2674



1. Streets of Bakersfield 2. Blue Side of Town 3. I Couldn't Leave You If I Tried 4. The Way We Make a Broken Heart 5. Don't Close Your Eyes 6. The Church on Cumberland Road 7. Darlene 8. Somewhere Tonight 9. The Last One to Know 10. Deeper Than the Holler 11. Living Proof 12. Barn to Boogie 13. This Crazy Love 14. New Shade of Blue 15. Love Me Like You Used To 16. I Got Dreams 17. Change of Heart 18. Song of the South 19. Do Ya' 20. I've Been Lookin' 21. (I'd Choose) You Again 22. A Long Line of Love

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CONTEMPORARY COUNTRY

THE LATE '80s • PURE GOLD

Buck Owens had never met Dwight Yoakam before the afternoon in 1987 that the rising star walked into the retired country superstar's Bakersfield offices without an appointment to suggest that they sing together onstage. But Owens knew who Yoakam was: the young singer was riding a booming career re-creating the Bakersfield honky-tonk sound, and was talking up Owens in interviews as one of country's unsung geniuses. Owens heard him out, and soon was appearing before audiences for the first time since 1980. As part of the Country Music Association's 30th Anniversary television special in 1988, Owens was asked to join Merle Haggard in representing the Bakersfield sound but Haggard had to cancel, and Owens recruited Yoakam as a replacement.

When the CMA asked the duo to sing a song about the central California city, Owens remembered **Streets of Bakersfield** off one of his 1972 albums. The

writer was Homer Jay, who had come to Bakersfield from Arkansas to pitch songs to Owens when he was still near his peak. For 10 days, Jay tried to get past Owens' secretary, and his frustration was reflected in the song's opening line "You don't know me but you don't like me." Owens liked it, but not enough to make it a single, so the song was still fairly unknown in the late '80s when he and Yoakam dusted it off for the special. When they performed the song again at the Academy of Country Music awards, a DJ videotaped it off his television set, and later played the audio portion on his radio show. Owens and Yoakam soon cut *Streets of Bakersfield* as a single with assistance from San Antonio conjunto accordionist Flaco Jimenez. *Streets of Bakersfield* became Yoakam's first No. 1 country hit, and Owens' first since 1972.

Though it took Yoakam to revitalize interest in Owens, Buck's influence had never entirely waned. Highway 101 was

formed by producer Paul Worley around Minnesotan Paulette Carlson, a Nashville hopeful for nearly a decade by the time the debut album came out in 1987.

Somewhere Tonight, the group's third hit, originated with Rodney Crowell, who turned to Nashville veteran Harlan Howard for help in emulating the Owens-Howard hits of the mid-'60s. Randy Travis had cut the song twice without releasing it, but a Warner Bros. executive remembered *Somewhere Tonight* when Highway 101 was looking for material, and this time artist and song clicked.

Crowell scored his own first No. 1 with **I Couldn't Leave You If I Tried**, a shuffle that echoed Owens' sound. He cut the song at the advice of his former piano player, Tony Brown, then one of the hottest producers and label executives in town. Brown felt that Crowell always recorded his most idiosyncratic material while giving his more commercial songs away. Brown must have beamed when *I Couldn't Leave You If I Tried* became Crowell's first bona fide smash after he spent a decade kicking around the lower reaches of the charts. Crowell produced wife Rosanne

Cash's **The Way We Make a Broken Heart**, which L.A. singer-songwriter John Hiatt had penned and even cut as an ill-fated duet with Rosanne back in his Nashville days.

Paul Overstreet and Don Schlitz were one of the era's most prolific songwriting teams. They wrote **Deeper Than the Holler** for Randy Travis because they liked the word holler and thought the phrase described his style. **You Again** was inspired by a chance remark by their songwriter friend Mike Reid, who observed the You-Again Syndrome among couples who had been married too long. Overstreet and Schlitz parlayed Reid's phrase into a more upbeat idea, which proved to be a No. 1 hit for the Forester Sisters.

Songwriter Bob McDill was still going strong, too. He based Keith Whitley's **Don't Close Your Eyes** on the scene in Neil Simon's *California Suite* in which an award-winning actress whose lover is gay expresses the fear that he always thinks of other men while making love to her. "Tonight," she tells him, "don't close your eyes." Whitley had thrown out a finished album and was screening new producers when Garth Fundis included

the song on a demo tape of tunes he wanted to cut with the former bluegrass star. It helped Fundis get the job, and *Don't Close Your Eyes* became Whitley's first No. 1. McDill's **Song of the South** was in his trademark literary-Dixie style, and had already been a minor hit for Johnny Russell, Tam T. Hall and Earl Scruggs in the early '80s. Alabama hesitated to revive *Song of the South*, fearing that it perpetuated anachronistic Southern stereotypes. They got around this stumbling block by using the fiddle to give the song more of a Cajun rather than a strict Southern feel.

Though Delbert McClinton cut **Darlene** first, T. Graham Brown decided to record the song when he and his producer, Ron Chancy, discovered they had both brought the song to a session without consulting each other. Matraca Berg co-wrote **The Last One to Know** with Jane Mariash when the former was still seeking her foothold in Nashville. She temporarily drifted into rock before returning to country, and the song was three years old when her former publishing house dug it up to offer to Reba McEntire. Michael Martin Murphy wrote most of his own materi-

al, but considered himself incapable of creating the "generic" love songs radio wanted. He turned to Paul Overstreet and Thom Schuyler for **A Long Line of Love**, which the latter conceived originally to sing at his brother-in-law's wedding. Steve Wariner was planning to record a ballad until he heard the groove his co-writer Bill LaBounty established on **I Got Dreams**. Shenandoah's **The Church on Cumberland Road** sprang from an incident when Bob DiPiero, in London to sing backup on a friend's album, stumbled out of a pub one night and grabbed the wall in front of a 600-year-old church. He finished it with a pair of partners after returning to Nashville.

Ricky Van Shelton's **Living Proof** was co-written by Johnny MacRae and Steve Clark at the former's Kentucky Lake cabin. Shelton wanted to name his album after the song, but was overruled because that was also the title of Hank Williams Jr.'s autobiography (and the name of a 1976 song by Hank Jr., a fact that was overlooked the whole time). The album eventually was called *Loving Proof*. Hank Jr. continued to write his own hits. **Born to Boogie** was already

the name of an album-in-progress when he brainstormed the song one morning at 2:30 after boating home to his cabin from a friend's place up the Tennessee River. Williams and his band had to use a drum machine to stay in time because the real drummer was exhausted by the end of the six hours required to perfect the demanding shuffle.

K.T. Oslin recorded **Do Ya'** while *Eighties Ladies* was a hit single, but prior to signing an album deal with RCA. Frustrated with contract negotiations, she played everything at half-tempo one day in the studio and concluded that *Do Ya'* actually sounded better—so she did the final take that way once she and the label had come to terms. Naomi Judd wrote **Change of Heart** while breaking up with her boyfriend, Larry Strickland (a former Elvis backup singer), and it appeared on the Judds' debut mini-album. They re-recorded it for their *Greatest Hits* set and Naomi, after a two-year separation, wound up back with Strickland around the same time.

—John Martland

DISCOGRAPHY

*Indicates highest Billboard country chart position

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Keith Whitley

