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# CONTEMPORARY COUNTRY

## The Early '80s • Hot Hits

- 1. My Baby Thinks He's a Train**  
Rosanne Cash
- 2. I'm Just an Old Chunk of Coal (But I'm Gonna Be a Diamond Someday)** John Anderson
- 3. Bobbie Sue** The Oak Ridge Boys
- 4. Love Is on a Roll** Don Williams
- 5. Tennessee Whiskey** George Jones
- 6. Always on My Mind** Willie Nelson
- 7. Theme from The Dukes of Hazzard (Good Ol' Boys)** Waylon Jennings
- 8. Party Time** T.G. Sheppard
- 9. Pickin' Up Strangers** Johnny Lee
- 10. You Win Again** Charley Pride
- 11. Are the Good Times Really Over (I Wish a Buck Was Still Silver)**  
Merle Haggard
- 12. Mountain Music** Alabama
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George Jones and Tammy Wynette
- 20. Any Day Now** Ronnie Milsap
- 21. The Sweetest Thing (I've Ever Known)** Juice Newton
- 22. She Left Love All Over Me**  
Rozzy Bailey

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CONTEMPORARY  
**COUNTRY**  
THE EARLY '80s • HOT HITS

COMPACT  
**disc**  
DIGITAL AUDIO

U.D. 28469-20

TDK-143

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TCD-143



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THE EARLY '80s • HOT HITS

Though his records were always hits, country music, like much of America, never embraced Elvis Presley when he was alive as fully as it did after his death on August 16, 1977. So it was that in the late '70s, Presley producer Felton Jarvis took several of the King's old records and stripped away the music to add more contemporary backing tracks. He struck pay dirt with **Guitar Man** in 1981, which had been a middling pop hit for Elvis in 1968. As on the original, songwriter Jerry Reed played lead guitar, and this version not only cracked the pop top 30, it became Elvis's first posthumous No. 1 country single since the period immediately following his death. Jarvis himself died in a Nashville hospital exactly two weeks before the remake first penetrated the charts.

Willie Nelson enjoyed his greatest early-'80s success with **Always on My Mind**, another song associated with Presley. Wayne Carson co-wrote the ballad in 1971 after a big night on the town, but

his Monument Records boss, Fred Foster, did not like Carson's version and never released it. Brenda Lee cut it in 1972, and later that year Elvis's *Always on My Mind* and *Separate Ways* went to No. 16 as a two-sided single after being pulled from the *Elvis on Tour* movie sound track. John Wesley Ryles took the song into the country top 20 in 1979, and co-writer Johnny Christopher subsequently pitched it to Nelson and Merle Haggard when they were recording their 1983 duet album. Hag did not like the song so Willie, agreeing that it would not work as a duet, saved it for himself. It brought him a No. 1 country hit, a No. 5 pop hit, three Grammys (including Song of the Year), two Academy of Country Music awards and four Country Music Association awards.

Ronnie McDowell also had a Presley association, since he launched his career with the 1977 tribute *The King Is Dead* and was an adept enough impersonator to sing the icon's parts in the posthumous

movie, *Elvis*. Years later, when McDowell's own identity was more intact, Jamie O'Hara, who was himself involved with an older woman, wrote **Older Women** for him using the melody to *Wandering Eyes*. Not only did this one go to the top (*Wandering Eyes* stopped at No. 2), but McDowell liked the melody so much he and producer Buddy Killen used it once more for the follow-up, *Watchin' Girls Go By*, which stalled at No. 4.

In the wake of John Travolta's movie *Urban Cowboy*, the early '80s was a time of huge commercial growth for country music, with new stars emerging regularly and the music often approaching middle-of-the-road pop. Johnny Lee, who led the house band at Gilley's, the nightclub immortalized in *Urban Cowboy*, benefited as much as anyone with his No. 1 smash from the sound track, *Lookin' for Love*, and the theme clicked again for him on **Pickin' Up Strangers**. John Anderson plied funkier country with his remake of Billy Joe Shaver's "outlaw" favorite, **I'm Just an Old Chunk of Coal (But I'm Gonna Be a Diamond Someday)**.

Rosanne Cash scored her second No. 1 with a remake of the rockabilly

**My Baby Thinks He's a Train**, which Leroy Preston of the Western swing group Asleep at the Wheel had written somewhat tongue-in-cheek four years earlier while living near the tracks in south Austin, Texas. Juice Newton also pumped new life into an old song on **The Sweetest Thing (I've Ever Known)**, but in this case, the song had been written about her. Her then-boyfriend, Otha Young, wrote it in 1975 when both of them were in the country-rock band Silver Spur. The original (which Newton also sang) featured an oboe instead of a pedal steel, so the newer version had a radically different feel.

Among other relative newcomers, Alabama racked up its sixth consecutive No. 1 in less than two years with **Mountain Music**. Randy Owens wrote the first verse back in 1979, when Alabama was still a struggling country-rock band in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. His homage to literary characters such as Tom Sawyer and Rip Van Winkle turned into a nostalgic look back at his Southern upbringing by the time he finished it more than a year later. Appropriately, the music then took a turn from Southern

rock toward bluegrass when the group recorded the hit single a second time (the band did not like its earlier version). After years as Southern journeymen who played a little bit of everything, the Bellamy Brothers finally went unequivocally country in 1979 with the No. 1 *If I Said You Have a Beautiful Body Would You Hold It against Me*. The next year, they came up with **Dancin' Cowboys** to celebrate their solidified image, and that became their third No. 1 in four tries.

Though he had been around since the mid-'70s, Earl Thomas Conley did not really click until the turn of the decade. **Fire and Smoke**—the chorus of which he had written five years earlier—turned out to be his last hit on producer Nelson Larkin's indie Sunbird label before Conley jumped to RCA. T.G. Sheppard had been scoring regularly since the mid-'70s, but **Party Time** proyed a change of pace for a singer known mainly for smooth love songs. This salute to the good-ol'-boy lifestyle was written by '60s rock balladeer Bruce Channel for Jerry Lee Lewis, who changed his mind and declined to record it.

Razzy Bailey became a consistent hit-

maker in the late '70s; he recorded **She Left Love All Over Me** only because his producer, Bob Montgomery, insisted. Bailey disliked the demo tape he heard, but Montgomery made some changes in the song by inserting the acoustic-guitar hook/turnaround, and the singer relented. John Conlee's **Common Man** had been a minor 1981 hit for its writer, Sammy Johns, who had been inspired initially by a pup he kept that was the product of an unholy mating between his pedigreed bird dog and a mutt from down the street. Conlee's interpretation became a blue-collar standard.

Among veterans, Merle Haggard worked his ambivalence-laced love for the past into another hit in **Are the Good Times Really Over (I Wish a Buck Was Still Silver)**. George Jones gave one woman his highest honor by comparing her favorably to **Tennessee Whiskey**, while he and Tammy Wynette paired up for the first time in three years to pound the final nail in the coffin of their relationship with the double entendre **Two Story House**. (Still at the top of her game, Wynette was trying to help Jones bounce back from alcohol rehabilitation, though the effort



proved superfluous when Jones came out a month later with *He Stopped Loving Her Today*.) **Bobbie Sue** was the Oak Ridge Boys' attempt to recapture the sound of *Elvira*. Charley Pride's **You Win Again** was pulled from his Hank Williams tribute album. Roger Cook, an English pop songwriter who moved to Nashville in the mid-'70s, and John Prine, the American folkie, began **Love Is on a Roll** while watching football on TV, then finished the song months later when the latter came off a tour. Convinced that the rock-oriented demo would not find any takers, Cook sold Don Williams on the song by playing it for him on his ukulele during a recording session.

Dolly Parton wrote **9 to 5** to escape boredom on the set of the movie of the same name; it was her first film, so she was not as used to the tedium as her co-stars, Jane Fonda and Lily Tomlin. **Theme from The Dukes of Hazzard (Good Ol' Boys)** was Waylon Jennings's first million-selling single. Jennings was the off-screen narrator for episodes of this TV series, which was spun off a good-ol'-boys movie called *Moonrunners* for which Jennings had also provided the theme song and narration (the show and the movie

shared some characters but had completely different casts). Jennings cut one version of this theme for television, and another for his *Music Man* album.

Ronnie Milsap's **Any Day Now** was a remake of Chuck Jackson's 1962 rhythm and blues hit co-written by Burt Bacharach (in leaner days, Milsap recorded seven unsuccessful R&B singles for Jackson's label). When Ronnie revived Jackson's tour de force, he got so carried away overdubbing parts—rhythm instruments, horns, strings, backup voices—that it wound up the first country single ever cut using two tandem 24-track tape recorders. In the early '80s, all things were possible.

—John Morthland

## DISCOGRAPHY

\*Indicates highest Billboard country chart position

**1. My Baby Thinks He's a Train** Rosanne Cash • Music and lyrics by Leroy Preston. Bug Music Inc. ASCAP. Columbia 02463 (1981). © 1981 Sony Music Entertainment Inc. No. 1\*

**2. I'm Just an Old Chunk of Coal (But I'm Gonna Be a Diamond Someday)** John Anderson • Music and lyrics by Billy Joe Shaver. ATV Music by Music Corporation of America, Inc. BMI. Warner 49699 (1981). © 1981 Warner Bros. Records Inc. Produced under license from Warner Bros. Records Inc. No. 4\*

**3. Bobbie Sue** The Oak Ridge Boys • Music and lyrics by Dan Tyler, Adell Tyler and Wood Newton. Warner House of Music. BMI. WB Gold Music Corporation. ASCAP. MCA 51231 (1982). © 1982 MCA Records, Inc. Courtesy of MCA Records, Inc. No. 1\*

**4. Love Is on a Roll** Don Williams • Music and lyrics by Roger Cook and John Prine. Screen Gems-EMI Music, Inc. BMI. Big Ears Music./Bruised Oranges. ASCAP. MCA 52205 (1983). © 1983 MCA Records, Inc. Courtesy of MCA Records, Inc. No. 1\*

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**6. Always on My Mind** Willie Nelson • Music and lyrics by Wayne Carson, John Christopher and Mark James. Screen Gems-EMI Music, Inc. BMI. Columbia 02741 (1982). © 1981 Sony Music Entertainment Inc. No. 1\*

**7. Theme from The Dukes of Hazzard (Good Ol' Boys)** Waylon Jennings • Music and lyrics by Waylon Jennings. Warner./Rich. BMI. RCA 12067 (1980). © 1980 BMG Music. No. 1\*

**8. Party Time** T.G. Sheppard • Music and lyrics by Bruce Channel. Sony Tree Pub. Co., Inc. BMI. Warner 49761 (1981). © 1981 Warner Bros. Records Inc. Produced under license from Warner Bros. Records Inc. No. 1\*

**9. Pickin' Up Strangers** Johnny Lee • Music and lyrics by Byron Hill. Welbeck Music by MCA Publishing. ASCAP. Full Moon 47105 (1981). © 1980 Warner Bros. Records Inc. Produced under license from Warner Bros. Records Inc. No. 3\*

**10. You Win Again** Charley Pride • Music and lyrics by Hank Williams. Fred Rose. BMI. RCA 12002 (1980). © 1980 BMG Music. No. 1\*

**11. Are the Good Times Really Over (I Wish a Buck Was Still Silver)** Merle Haggard • Music and lyrics by Merle Haggard. Shade Tree Music. BMI. Epic 02894 (1982). © 1981 Sony Music Entertainment Inc. No. 2\*

**12. Mountain Music** Alabama • Music and lyrics by Randy Owen. May Pop Music. BMI. RCA 13019 (1982). © 1981 BMG Music. No. 1\*

**13. Guitar Man** Elvis Presley • Music and lyrics by Jerry Reid Hubbard. Vector. BMI. RCA 12158 (1981). © 1981 BMG Music. No. 1\*

**14. Common Man** John Conlee • Music and lyrics by Sammy Johns. Lowery Music Inc./Careers-BMG Music Pub., Inc./Longitude Music. BMI. MCA 52178 (1983). © 1982 MCA Records, Inc. Courtesy of MCA Records, Inc. No. 1\*



**15. Older Women** Ronnie McDowell • *Music and lyrics by James O'Hara. Sony Tree Pub. Co., Inc. BMI. Epic 02129 (1981). © 1981 Sony Music Entertainment Inc. No. 1\**

**16. Dancin' Cowboys** The Bellamy Brothers • *Music and lyrics by David Bellamy. Famous Music Corporation./Bellamy Brothers Music. ASCAP. Warner 49241 (1980). © 1979. Courtesy of Curb Music Co. No. 1\**

**17. 9 to 5** Dolly Parton • *Music and lyrics by Dolly Parton. Velvet Apple Music./Tree Group. BMI. RCA 12133 (1981). © 1980 BMG Music. No. 1\**

**18. Fire and Smoke** Earl Thomas Conley • *Music and lyrics by Earl Thomas Conley. EMI April Music./Blue Moon Music. ASCAP. Sunbird 7561 (1981). © 1981 BMG Music. No. 1\**

**19. Two Story House** George Jones and Tammy Wynette • *Music and lyrics by Glenn Tubbs, David Lindsey and Tammy Wynette. ATV Music./First Lady Songs. BMI. Epic 50849 (1980). © 1980 Sony Music Entertainment Inc. No. 2\**

**20. Any Day Now** Ronnie Milsap • *Music and lyrics by Burt F. Bacharach and Bob Hilliard. Intersong. ASCAP. RCA 13216 (1982). © 1982 BMG Music. No. 1\**

**21. The Sweetest Thing (I've Ever Known)** Juice Newton • *Music and lyrics by Oltha Young. Sterling Music Company./Addison Street Music. ASCAP. Capitol 5046 (1981). © 1981. Courtesy Capitol Records, Inc., under license from CEMA Special Markets. No. 1\**

**22. She Left Love All Over Me** Razy Bailey • *Music and lyrics by Chester Lester. Warner. BMI. RCA 13007 (1982). © 1981 BMG Music. No. 1\**



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*Waylon Jennings*

