

THE RISE OF COUNTRY MUSIC

BY

JIM LOVE

MAY 2, 1996

''MADE A WISH UPON A STAR,  
THAT I COULD HAVE A BRAND NEW CAR...  
GOT TIRED OF WISHING, SO I STOLE ONE.

17 AND KNEW IT ALL,  
MY DREAMS WERE BIG,  
BUT MY THOUGHTS WERE SMALL,  
SO MANY ROADS, SOMEHOW  
I CHOSE THE WRONG ONE''

THOSE ARE THE OPENING VERSES OF AN OBVIOUSLY COUNTRY MUSIC SONG ENTITLED  
''JESUS AND MAMA ALWAYS LOVED ME'' BY THE GROUP KNOWN AS ''THE CONFEDERATE  
RAILROAD'', WHICH, INCIDENTALLY, MADE AN APPEARANCE AT THE WESTERN KENTUCKY  
STATE FAIR IN RECENT YEARS.

FOR THOSE OF YOU WHO ARE FM RADIO LISTENERS, THOSE ARE THE KIND OF  
LYRICS YOU'VE, NO DOUBT, COME ACROSS FREQUENTLY WHILE SEARCHING FOR SOME  
BACH, BRAHMS, OR BEETHOVEN, OR P.B.S.'S ''MORNING EDITION'' WITH BOB EDWARDS;  
OR ''ALL THINGS CONSIDERED'' HOSTED BY NOAH ADAMS, WHO LIKE EDWARDS, IS A  
NATIVE KENTUCKIAN, OR EVEN DICK ESTELL AND THE ''RADIO READER''.

FOR COUNTRY MUSIC, IN ONE FORM OR ANOTHER, HAS COME TO DOMINATE THE RADIO  
SPECTRUM IN THE UNITED STATES IN THE LATE 20TH CENTURY.

IN AN ERA WHEN THERE ARE NO LESS THAN 20 IDENTIFIABLE MUSIC FORMATS FOR RADIO, NO LESS THAN ONE STATION IN FIVE IS PLAYING COUNTRY MUSIC IN ONE FORM OR ANOTHER; AND IN THE SOUTHEAST, IT INCREASES TO ONE IN FOUR, INCLUDING WHOP-FM, WHERE "CD COUNTRY" ORIGINATES VIA SATELLITE IN COLORADO, WHERE SOME DISC JOCKEY WHO HAS NO IDEA WHETHER ITS SNOWING, SLEETING, RAINING OR THE SUN IS SHINING IN HOPKINSVILLE, KENTUCKY, GENERICALLY INTRODUCES SONGS, AND COMMENTS ON THE ARTISTS IN THE TIME-HONORED TRADITION OF ALL RADIO ANNOUNCERS, THOUGH--AS I MENTIONED--HE IS DEPRIVED OF GIVING THE TEMPERATURE OR EVEN THE TIME, THOUGH SOMETIMES, THEY WILL VENTURE A "25 MINUTES BEFORE THE HOUR", MUCH LIKE THE MORNING NEWS SHOWS ON NETWORK TELEVISION.

IN ADDITION TO "JESUS AND MAMA", WHICH DETAILS THE TRAVELS OF A YOUNG REBEL WHO EVENTUALLY "CHOOSES THE RIGHT ROAD", "CONFEDERATE RAILROAD" HAS TOPPED THE CHARTS WITH SONGS LIKE "WHEN YOU LEAVE LIKE THAT, YOU CAN NEVER GO BACK", A COMPANION SONG TO "JESUS AND MAMA"; "TRASHY WOMEN", ABOUT A TEENAGER WHOSE ACTIONS FELL FAR SHORT OF HIS PARENTS' EXPECTATIONS AS DETAILED IN LYRICS STATING, "YOU SHOULDA SEEN THE LOOKS ON THE FACES OF MY DAD AND MOM, WHEN I SHOWED UP LATE WITH MY DATE FOR THE SENIOR PROM..THEY SAID, PARDON ME SON....SHE AIN'T NO KID, THAT COCKTAIL WAITRESS WITH THE DOLLY PARTON WIG, AND I SAID I KNOW...AINT SHE COOL? THAT'S THE KIND I DIG", OR "THE QUEEN OF MEMPHIS" IN WHICH THE NARRATOR--AGAIN A RURAL TEENAGER--TRAVELS NORTH TO MEMPHIS AND MEETS A WOMAN OF QUESTIONABLE MORAL CHARACTER, WHOM HE SPENDS THE NIGHT WITH, AND "WOKE UP THE NEXT MORNING, A PRISONER OF HER CHARMS. SHE SHOWED ME THINGS I'D NEVER SEEN, BACK THERE ON THE FARM".

SUCH ADULT THEMES ARE COMMON AMONG COUNTRY MUSIC SONGS, SOME OF WHICH HAVE DOWNRIGHT SUGGESTIVE TITLES, SUCH AS, THE BELLAMY BROTHERS', 'IF I SAID YOU HAD A BEAUTIFUL BODY, WOULD YOU HOLD IT AGAINST ME?', 'GET YOUR BISCUITS IN THE OVEN AND YOUR BUNS IN BED' BY KINKY FREIDMEN, AND THE FROG-VOICED COUNTRY MUSIC LEGEND, THE LATE CONWAY TWITTY, WITH HITS LIKE 'TIGHT FITTIN' JEANS', 'HELLO, DARLIN'', AND THE BLUNTLY TITLED 'I'D LOVE TO LAY YOU DOWN'.

THERE WAS A STORY MAKING THE ROUNDS DURING TWITTY'S LIFETIME ABOUT AN ITINERANT PREACHER, A TRAVELLING EVANGELIST IF YOU WILL, WHO BORE A STRIKING RESEMBLANCE TO TWITTY, WHO INCIDENTALLY, NEVER LEGALLY CHANGED HIS NAME FROM HAROLD LLOYD JENKINS, AND WAS OFFENDED WHEN I BROUGHT IT UP DURING AN INTERVIEW AT THE WESTERN KENTUCKY STATE FAIR SEVERAL YEARS AGO.

THE STORY WENT THAT THE PREACHER AND HIS ENTOURAGE ARRIVED IN A TOWN FOR A TENT REVIVAL ONE DAY, AND THINKING THAT MOTEL OCCUPANTS WOULD BE A LIKELY SOURCE OF POTENTIAL CONVERTS, BEING IN TOWN AND MAYBE HAVING SOME TIME ON THEIR HANDS THAT EVENING, THE PREACHER MADE THE ROUNDS AT THE LOCAL INN, WITH ENCOUNTERS WITH THREE FEMALES IN SEPARATE ROOMS PROVING THAT EVEN MINISTERS---AT LEAST THIS ONE, HAVE THEIR LIMITS.

ALL THREE WOMEN HAPPENED TO BE COUNTRY MUSIC FANS WHO IMMEDIATELY RECOGNIZED WHO THEY THOUGHT WAS CONWAY TWITTY.

THE THIRD, OBVIOUSLY EXPECTING SOMEONE ELSE, CAME TO THE DOOR WEARING A BATH TOWEL AND NOTHING ELSE, AND AFTER INITIALLY BEING STRUCK SPEECHLESS, FINALLY FOUND HER TONGUE AND ASKED, 'CONWAY TWITTY, WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?'...TO WHICH THE PREACHER REPLIED, 'HELLO, DARLIN'.

AS MOST OF YOU PROBABLY KNOW, COUNTRY MUSIC IS A PRODUCT OF THE RURAL SOUTH, WHERE EARLY SETTLERS DREW ON BRITISH AND SCOTTISH FOLK BALLADS, SINGING THE TALES OF HARDSHIP AND WOE 'A CAPPELLA' AND HANDING THEM DOWN, ORALLY, FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION.

FROM THAT HUMBLE BEGINNING, ACCORDING TO TOM ROLAND IN THE INTRODUCTION TO HIS BOOK 'NUMBER ONE COUNTRY HITS', COUNTRY MUSIC HAS UNDERGONE AN ENORMOUS TRANSFORMATION, THOUGH THE COMMON THEMES OF DOOMED LOVE AND POVERTY REMAIN A MAINSTAY AS THE MUSIC FORM EVOLVED FROM A REGIONALLY-SPECIALIZED AUDIENCE WHICH HE CLAIMS 60 PERCENT OF AMERICANS NOW LISTEN TO ON A REGULAR BASIS.

ROLAND TRACES COUNTRY MUSIC FROM THE STRING BANDS OF THE 1920'S AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE 'GRAND OLD OPRY' RADIO PROGRAM WHICH W.S.M. IN NASHVILLE BEAMED TO MOST OF THE EASTERN UNITED STATES EVERY SATURDAY NIGHT TO HANK WILLIAMS' APPEARANCE ON THE SCENE IN THE LATE 40'S, WHICH ROLAND SAYS CHANGED COUNTRY MUSIC FOREVER, WITH POPULAR ARTISTS LIKE TONY BENNETT AND JO STAFFORD BRINGING HIS SONGS TO THE ENTIRE NATION.

THE 50'S SAW EDDY ARNOLD AND MARTY ROBBINS BEGIN A 'CROSSOVER' TREND, BUT ELVIS PRESLEY, WHO BEGAN AS A PURELY 'COUNTRY SINGER' VIRTUALLY KILLED OFF THE COMMERCIAL COUNTRY FORMAT WITH THE RISE OF 'ROCK AND ROLL' IN THE MID-TO-LATE 50'S.

IN RESPONSE TO THIS, SEVERAL TRENDS WITHIN THE INDUSTRY DEVELOPED INCLUDING THE 'ROCKABILLY' SOUND OF JOHNNY CASH AND THE 'HIGH LONESOME' SOUND OF THE EVERLY BROTHERS, WITH THOSE ARTISTS ALSO ENJOYING WIDESPREAD SUCCESS IN THE 'POP' MARKETS, A TREND WHICH HAS CONTINUED TO THE PRESENT, THOUGH THE SONGS CONTINUE TO CHRONICLE VERY BASIC HUMAN EMOTIONS AND SITUATIONS.

THERE ARE MANY THEORIES ON THE EMERGENCE OF 'HILLBILLY MUSIC', AS IT WAS ONCE WIDELY KNOWN, AS THE 'MOST HEARD' TYPE OF MUSIC, RANGING FROM THE COLLAPSE OF 'ROCK AND ROLL', WHOSE DOWNFALL, I THINK, BEGAN WHEN 'DISCO' MUSIC MADE ITS MOVE IN THE 1970'S.

SEVERAL OF THOSE THEORIES ARE BASED ON SOCIOLOGICAL, DEMOGRAPHIC, AND EVEN ETHNIC DATA MANIPULATED BY THE SO-CALLED 'EXPERTS' AND 'HIRED GUNS' WHO ACT AS PAID CONSULTANTS TO RADIO STATIONS WHOSE MANAGEMENT THEN MAKE A DECISION ON WHICH FORMAT WOULD DELIVER THE MOST LISTENERS TO THEIR ADVERTISERS AND THEREFORE, GENERATE THE MOST PROFITS.

WHILE W.S.M. IN NASHVILLE, W.B.A.P. IN DALLA-FORT WORTH, TEXAS; AND W.W.V.A. IN WHEELING, WEST VIRGINIA WERE 'POWERHOUSE' A.M. RADIO STATIONS WHICH DELIVERED COUNTRY MUSIC NOT ONLY TO THEIR AREAS, BUT TO DISPLACED SOUTHERNERS WHO MOVED NORTH AFTER WORLD WAR TWO, THE 'BREAKTHROUGH' FOR THE MODERN ERA OF COUNTRY MUSIC CAME IN CHICAGO, WHERE W.J.J.D. HAD ABANDONED COUNTRY MUSIC, HEADED UP BY PROGRAMS LIKE 'RANDY BLAKE AND THE SUPPERTIME FROLICS' FOR 'ROCK AND ROLL' IN THE MID-50'S.

W.J.J.D. ADOPTED A 'ROCK AND ROLL' FORMAT, INCLUDING JINGLES, BUT SUBSTITUTED COUNTRY MUSIC AND BECAME A MAJOR FACTOR IN THE MAJOR RADIO MARKET OF THE CHICAGO METROPOLITAN AREA, OR 'CHICAGOLAND' AS WE YANKEES FROM THAT AREA KNOW IT AS.

LIKE ALL BUSINESSES, RADIO EXECUTIVES ARE PRONE TO COPY SUCCESSFUL VENTURES IN THEIR FIELD, AND OTHERS FOLLOWED, WITH SOME EQUAL SUCCESS, THOUGH COUNTRY MUSIC LANGUISHED SOMEWHAT IN THE 60'S BEFORE BLOSSOMING IN THE 70'S, LENDING SUPPORT TO MY THEORY ABOUT 'DISCO' MUSIC.

IN ADDITION TO THE THEORIES BY THE SO-CALLED 'EXPERTS' CONCERNING THE EMERGENCE OF COUNTRY MUSIC AS THE DOMINANT RADIO FORMAT OVER THE PAST SEVERAL YEARS, WITH THE END NOT YET IN SIGHT, ARE SEVERAL PERSONAL THEORIES WHICH I INTEND TO ADVANCE TONIGHT.

THE FIRST OF THESE IS WHAT I CALLED THE 'RAY MOFIELD' THEORY, NAMED AFTER THE MAN I HEARD IT FROM.

THE LATE DOCTOR MOFIELD, WHO DIED LAST YEAR AFTER A DISTINGUISHED BROADCASTING AND ACADEMIC CAREER, WHICH WOULD HAVE BEEN CROWNED WITH THE PRESIDENCY OF MURRAY STATE UNIVERSITY HAD THE "POLITICS" BEEN RIGHT, SAID A PERSON CAN LISTEN TO COUNTRY MUSIC AND UNDERSTAND THE LYRICS, WHILE BEING ABLE TO SING ALONG WITHOUT, IN HIS WORDS, "DISLOCATING YOUR EPIGLOTTIS".

HE ALSO SAID YOU COULD SING THE SONG IN FRONT OF YOUR MOTHER WITHOUT BEING EMBARRASSED, THOUGH THAT HAS CHANGED IN RECENT YEARS, AS EVIDENCED BY SUCH TITLES AS, "IF I SAID YOU HAD A BEAUTIFUL BODY, WOULD YOU HOLD IT AGAINST ME?"

ANOTHER REASON FOR THE RISE IN COUNTRY MUSIC, ALSO NAMED BY ME AFTER ITS AUTHOR, IS THE "BEN PAYNE THEORY".

BEN, NOW A SOPHOMORE AT MURRAY STATE UNIVERSITY, AND THE SON OF CHRISTIAN COUNTY FARM BUREAU PRESIDENT BUTCH PAYNE AND PEMBROKE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHER BRENDA PAYNE OF PEMBROKE SAYS HE THINKS THE "MUSIC OF CHOICE" FOR HIS CONTEMPORARIES AND HIM IS A RESULT OF HIS PARENTS' ABANDONMENT OF "ROCK AND ROLL".

AGAIN, MY THEORY OF THE PERVASIVE INFLUENCE OF "DISCO" IS UPHELD, WITH THE PARENTS OF CHILDREN BORN IN THE 70'S, INCLUDING ALL 3 OF OUR KIDS, REVERTING TO "OLDIES" OF THE 1950'S AND 60'S, WHICH THOSE NOW IN THEIR LATE TEENS AND EARLY 20'S WERE EXPOSED TO IN THEIR EARLY YEARS.

BEN THINKS, AND I AGREE, THAT 50'S AND 60'S "ROCK AND ROLL" IS SIMILAR TO MUCH OF THE CURRENT COUNTRY OFFERINGS, WITH A "DANCEABLE" BEAT, DRIVEN BY VERSATILE "LEAD" GUITARISTS AND A STRONG DRUMMER IN THE BACKGROUND.

THEN THERE'S THE "JIM LOVE THEORY", WITH ITS VARIOUS ELEMENTS WHICH I INTEND TO EXPOUND ON DURING MY REMAINING TIME.

FIRST AND FOREMOST--LIKE IT OR NOT--AND, OF COURSE, PRESENT COMPANY EXCLUDED, AMERICA IS AN ANTI-INTELLECTUAL SOCIETY AND--BY AND LARGE--COUNTRY MUSIC'S OVERALL IMAGE, THOUGH IT HAS CHANGED WITH THE INFUSION OF YOUNGER GENS, QUALIFIES.

\* I ONCE HAD AN ENGLISH TEACHER WHO COMBINED THE RATHER INTERESTING BACKGROUND OF BEING A FORMER MARINE CORPS DRILL SERGEANT AND A PUBLISHED POET, BUT TAUGHT AT THE BOTH THE HIGH SCHOOL AND JUNIOR COLLEGE LEVEL IN ELGIN, ILLINOIS.

ROBERT FOSTER SAID THERE WERE SEVERAL REASONS WHY ADLAI STEVENSON LOST TWO PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS TO DWIGHT EISENHOWER, NOT THE LEAST OF WHICH WAS 'MIKE'S' WAR HERO STATUS, BUT MR. FOSTER SAID HE ALWAYS FELT THAT THE 'KISS OF DEATH' FOR STEVENSON CAME WHEN HE WAS IDENTIFIED IN THE MEDIA AS AN 'EGGHEAD'--A PAJORETIVE TERM FOR INTELLECTUAL.

AS AN ASIDE--AND THERE WILL BE SEVERAL--STEVENSON, A FORMER GOVERNOR OF THE GREAT STATE OF ILLINOIS, IS MORE CORRECTLY IDENTIFIED AS ADLAI STEVENSON JUNIOR, SON OF ADLAI SENIOR OF SOUTH CHRISTIAN COUNTY, WHO WENT ON TO BECOME A FOOTNOTE IN AMERICAN HISTORY AS GROVER CLEVELAND'S SECOND VICE-PRESIDENT, WITH ADLAI THE 3RD FOLLOWING IN BOTH HIS FATHER'S AND GRANDFATHER'S FOOTSTEPS WHEN HE WAS ELECTED TO THE U.S. SENATE FROM ILLINOIS IN THE 1970'S.

QUOTING FRANK MYERS, WHO CO-AUTHORED THE SONG 'I SWEAR', WHICH WENT TO NUMBER ONE ON THE 'COUNTRY', 'POP', AND 'RHYTHM AND BLUES' CHARTS, 'PEOPLE NEED TO REALIZE THAT UNLESS THERE'S SOMETHING IN THE LYRICAL CONTENT ABOUT BUBBA, TRUCKS, PRISON, OR MAMA, THE ONLY DIFFERENCE BETWEEN COUNTRY, POP, AND RHYTHM AND BLUES IS THE PRODUCTION. PEOPLE ARE LOOKING FOR THE BEST SONGS THEY BUY'.

THAT ALSO MAY BE THE KEY BECAUSE SOMETIMES IT MAY TAKE TWO OR THREE SONGS TO DETERMINE WHETHER YOU'RE LISTENING TO A RADIO STATION WITH A COUNTRY OR ROCK FORMAT.

THE REFERENCE TO THE FACTORS SETTING ASIDE A 'PURE COUNTRY SONG' BRINGS TO MIND THE STORY BY DAVID ALLEN COE--KNOWN AS A RENEGADE COUNTRY PERFORMER--ABOUT A SONG HE RECORDED CALLED 'YOU NEVER EVEN CALLED ME BY NAME'.



DURING A "BREAK" BETWEEN VERSES, COE RELATES A CONVERSATION HE HAD WITH THE AUTHOR, THE LATE STEVE GOODMAN, WHO COUNTED AMONG HIS OTHER SONGS "THE LAST WORDS OF A DYING CUBS FAN".

GOODMAN TOLD COE THAT HE FELT THAT HE HAD WRITTEN THE "PERFECT COUNTRY SONG", WITH COE DISPUTING THAT CLAIM, SAYING THERE WAS NO WAY IT COULD BE THE PERFECT COUNTRY SONG WHEN IT HADN'T MENTIONED MAMA, TRUCKS, PRISON, THE WEATHER OR GETTING DRUNK.

GOODMAN WENT TO WORK AND PRODUCED ANOTHER VERSE, WHICH COE QUICKLY PRONOUNCED THE ELEMENT NEEDED TO, INDEED, MAKE "YOU NEVER EVEN CALLED ME BY MY NAME" THE PERFECT COUNTRY SONG.

THE FINAL VERSE GOES LIKE THIS:

WELL, I WAS DRUNK THE DAY MY MOM GOT OUT OF PRISON,  
AND I WENT TO PICK HER UP IN THE RAIN.  
BUT BEFORE I COULD GET TO THE STATION IN MY PICKUP TRUCK,  
SHE GOT RUNNED OVER BY A DAMNED OLD TRAIN.....

FOLLOWED BY THE REFRAIN....

SO, I'LL HANG AROUND AS LONG AS YOU WILL LET ME,  
AND I NEVER MINDED STANDING IN THE RAIN.  
YOU DON'T HAVE TO CALL ME DARLIN'...DARLIN',  
YOU NEVER EVEN CALLED ME BY MY NAME.

IT'S A GENERALLY ACCEPTED RULE IN THE MUSIC BUSINESS THAT "THE SONG'S THE THING", WITH A WORLD OF VOCAL TALENT VYING FOR A LIMITED NUMBER OF POTENTIAL HITS, THOUGH SOME OF THEM GO UNRECOGNIZED FOR ONE REASON OR ANOTHER.

IN FACT, IT WAS GENE AUTRY'S WIFE WHO CONVINCED HIM TO RECORD "RUDOLPH, THE RED-NOSED REINDEER", WHICH RANKS WITH "WHITE CHRISTMAS" AS ONE OF THE ALL-TIME "MOST PLAYED" HOLIDAY SONGS.

FROM TIME TO TIME, VARIOUS LISTS ARE COMPILED OF THE "ALL-TIME" "ALL-TIME" COUNTRY SONGS, WHICH, LIKE MOST SUCH COMPILATIONS, ARE ENTIRELY SUBJECTIVE, BUT A LOOK AT "BILLBOARD" MAGAZINE'S "TOP 100 ALL-TIME COUNTRY HITS" GIVES SOME INSIGHT INTO THE PREVAILING THEME OF COUNTRY MUSIC OVER THE YEARS....AND THAT IS "LOVE"--IN ONE FORM OR ANOTHER, WITH NO LESS THAN 15 OF THE ALL-TIME TOP 20 SONGS HAVING THAT AS THEIR MAJOR THEME.

THEY RANGE FROM THE NUMBER ONE ALL-TIME SONG, "WALK ON BY", MADE POPULAR BY LEROY VAN DYKE,WHO IS BEST KNOWN TO THOSE OF US WHO FOLLOW COUNTRY MUSIC FOR "THE AUCTIONEER" TO NUMBER 20 "MAMA SANG A SONG", A VOCAL AND RECITATION BY "WHISPERING BILL ANDERSON".

ANDERSON IS ANOTHER STAR WHOM I FELT LACKED A SENSE OF HUMOR--OR AT LEAST UNDERSTANDING--WHEN I INTERVIEWED HIM SEVERAL YEARS AGO--AGAIN AT THE WESTERN KENTUCKY STATE FAIR.

IN ADDITION TO A LENGTHY--AND FRUITFUL--RECORDING CAREER,ANDERSON HAS WRITTEN NUMEROUS HIT SONGS FOR OTHER PERFORMERS, AND WOULD BE FINANCIALLY SECURE HAD HE NEVER "WHISPERED" INTO A MICROPHONE.

I OBSERVED THAT HE WAS ONE OF THE FEW NOTED COUNTRY MUSIC PERFORMERS WHO HAD EARNED A COLLEGE DEGREE, AND HE RESPONDED THAT, YES, HE POSSESSES A DEGREE IN JOURNALISM FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA.

I THOUGHT I WAS BEING FACETIOUS WHEN I SAID THAT HE ALWAYS HAD THAT TO "FALL BACK ON" IF HIS COUNTRY MUSIC CAREER EVER COLLAPSED, WHICH BROUGHT THE STRAIGHT-FACED COMMENT, "NO, I DON'T THINK THAT WILL HAPPEN".

BACK TO THE "LOVE" THEME IN COUNTRY MUSIC SONGS, I THINK THAT'S NO DIFFERENT FROM OTHER STYLES OF MUSIC, RANGING BACK TO THE "STANDARDS" OF THE 30'S AND 40'S LIKE "STARDUST", "SEPTEMBER SONG", AND "AS TIME GOES BY".

IN RESEARCHING THIS PAPER, I FOUND AT LEAST TWO OTHER "ALL-TIME" COUNTRY MUSIC SONG LISTS, WITH "HE STOPPED LOVING HER TODAY" BY GEORGE JONES TOPPING THE LIST COMPILED BY "COUNTRY MUSIC" MAGAZINE AND "SING ME BACK HOME" BY MERLE HAGGARD THE "NUMBER ONE ALL-TIME" COUNTRY SONG LIST AS WRITTEN BY TOM ROLAND AND MENTIONED AT THE OUTSET.

"HE STOPPED LOVING HER TODAY" IS THE STORY OF A MAN WHO ONLY OBTAINED RELIEF FROM HIS ALL-CONSUMING LOVE FOR A WOMAN WHO LEFT HIM WHEN SHE DIED, WHILE "SING ME BACK HOME" NARRATES THE TRIP OF A CONDEMNED MAN FROM HIS CELL TO THE SITE OF HIS EXECUTION AS HE ASKS ONE OF HIS FELLOW "DEATH ROW" INMATES TO SING HIM A SONG REMINDING OF BETTER TIMES AND PLACES.

WHILE THE CREATION OF "C.M.T.", "COUNTRY MUSIC TELEVISION" FOR CABLE CONSUMPTION IN WHICH FANS CAN NOT ONLY HEAR, BUT SEE, THEIR FAVORITE PERFORMERS, THE EMERGENCE OF SUCH APPELLING--OR DOWNRIGHT SEXY--PERFORMERS LIKE BILLY RAY CYRUS, AARON TIPPIN, AND TRAVIS TRITT ON THE MALE SIDE, AND FEMALES DOLLY PARTON, REBA MCINTIRE, AND CARLEEN CARTER, AND THE INCREASING POPULARITY OF COUNTRY MUSIC "DANCE HALLS" SUCH AS THE "RED ROPER" IN CLARKSVILLE HAVE, NO DOUBT, SERVED TO INCREASE THE POPULARITY OF COUNTRY MUSIC, TO ME, THE CONTINUING APPEAL TO BASIC HUMAN EMOTIONS AND PLACES WHERE WE CAN ONLY IMAGINE BEING, BUT ARE VICARIOUSLY TRANSPORTED BY WAY OF A GOOD COUNTRY SONG IS THE BASIC, LASTING APPEAL.

I'M GOING TO CLOSE WITH THE LYRICS FROM ONE OF MY FAVORITE GARTH BROOKS SONGS, WHICH TO ME OFFERS A COMBINATION OF WORDS RIVALLING SOME OF THE POETRY I WAS ASKED TO CRITIQUE IN COLLEGE; HOWEVER, BEFORE THAT I MUST ADVISE YOU THAT I ORIGINALLY CONSIDERED GOING "FULL CIRCLE" IN MY APPEARANCES BEFORE THIS SOCIETY.

SOME OF YOU DON'T KNOW IT, BUT, IN ADDITION TO PROBABLY BEING THE MOST "NORTHERN BORN" PERSON TO EVER BECOME A MEMBER OF THIS WORTHY GROUP, I BECAME THE FIRST PERSON IN THE HISTORY OF THE ATHENAEUM SOCIETY TO DO ANYTHING OTHER THAN MAKE A PURELY ORAL PRESENTATION OF A "PAPER".

I MADE MY DEBUT IN THE EARLY 80'S BY PRODUCING AND PLAYING A CASSETTE TAPE ENTITLED 'GARRISON KEILLOR AND THE PRAIRIE HOME COMPANION' IN WHICH I GAVE A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF THE CREATOR OF THE MOST POPULAR PROGRAM IN THE HISTORY OF AMERICAN PUBLIC RADIO, AND INCORPORATED 'SOUND BITES' FROM KEILLOR.

I THOUGHT I MIGHT DO SOMETHING SIMILAR TONIGHT AND INCLUDE PIECES OF SONGS WHICH I FELT DEMONSTRATED SOME OF THE MORE APPEALING ASPECTS OF COUNTRY MUSIC, BUT SINCE I FELT THAT MY PRECEDENT-SETTING ACTION LED, IN SOME SMALL WAY, TO WENDELL RORIE'S ENSUING VIDEOTAPE PRESENTATION OF A TRIP TO RUSSIA, AND ANOTHER, SIMILAR EFFORT MIGHT LEAD TO EVEN MORE VIDEOTAPES BY OTHER MEMBERS OF THE SOCIETY, I ABANDONED THAT IDEA ENTIRELY AND, FOR REINFORCEMENT OF MY THEME, I AM RELYING ON YOUR MEMORIES OF YOUR FAVORITE COUNTRY SONG, WHICH MIGHT EVEN INCLUDE SUCH GEMS AS 'YOU'RE THE REASON OUR KIDS ARE UGLY', 'SHE GOT THE GOLD MINE..I GOT THE SHAFT', 'SHE'S ACTING SINGLE, I'M DRINKING DOUBLES', 'I'VE GOT TEARS IN EARS FROM LYING ON MY BACK IN MY BED WHILE I CRY OVER YOU', OR THE HANK WILLIAMS CLASSIC, 'THERE'S A TEAR IN MY BEER CAUSE I'M CRYING FOR YOU DEAR, YOU WERE ON MY LONELY MIND'.

ANYWAY, HERE IS 'THE RIVER', CO-AUTHORED BY VICTORIA SHAW AND GARTH  
BROOKS.

YOU KNOW A DREAM IS LIKE A RIVER  
EVER CHANGING AS IT FLOWS  
AND A DREAMER'S JUST A VESSEL  
THAT MUST FOLLOW WHERE IT FLOWS.  
TRYING TO LEARN FROM WHAT'S BEHIND YOU  
AND NEVER KNOWING WHAT'S IN STORE  
MAKES EACH DAY A CONSTANT BATTLE  
JUST TO STAY BETWEEN THE SHORES.

YES, I WILL SAIL MY VESSEL  
TIL THE RIVER RUNS DRY  
LIKE A BIRD UPON THE WIND  
THESE WATERS ARE MY SKY  
I'LL NEVER REACH MY DESTINATION  
EVEN IF I NEVER TRY  
SO I WILL SAIL MY VESSEL  
TIL THE RIVER RUNS DRY

TOO MANY TIMES WE STAND ASIDE  
AND LET THE WATER SLIP AWAY  
TIL WHAT WE PUT OFF TIL TOMORROW  
HAS NOW BECOME TODAY  
SO DON'T YOU SIT UPON THE SHORELINE  
AND SAY YOU'RE SATISFIED  
CHOOSE TO CHANCE THE RAPIDS  
AND DARE TO DANCE THE TIDE

AND THERE'S BOUND TO BE ROUGH WATERS  
AND I KNOW I'LL TAKE SOME FALLS  
BUT WITH THE GOOD LORD AS MY CAPTAIN  
I CAN MAKE IT THROUGH THEM ALL

YES, I WILL SAIL MY VESSEL  
TIL THE RIVER RUNS DRY  
LIKE A BIRD UPON THE WIND  
THESE WATERS ARE MY SKY  
I'LL NEVER REACH MY DESTINATION  
IF I NEVER TRY  
SO I WILL SAIL MY VESSEL  
TIL THE RIVER RUNS DRY...  
TIL THE RIVER RUNS DRY.

THANK YOU AND GOOD NIGHT.