

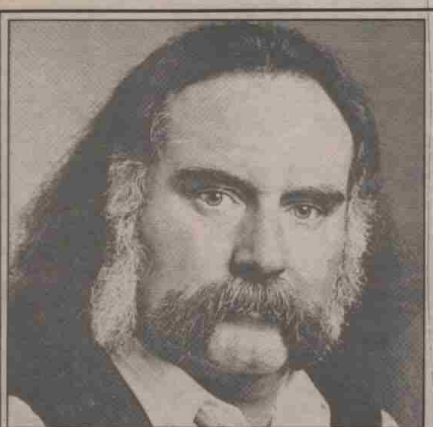
COUNTRY MUSIC

The right label to be seen on



Home Jay

ACKNOWLEDGED as the No. 1 country vocalist in the cabaret field, GENTLEMAN JAY RAWLINS has decided to spend this summer at home, working the flourishing holiday centre and concert circuit, after a long spell last year spent fronting his own show in the Portuguese casinos.



BIRMINGHAM singer MAC BAILEY has been signed by American label Playback and recorded his first album in Nashville last month, on which are four of his own songs. Born in this country, his father being an American GI, Mac started as a rock and roll guitarist with various bands in the sixties, later leading his own group Fabel, which was signed to CBS Records. He joined the country band Desperado in the mid-seventies and has now formed his own group, which started touring this month.

By MICK GREEN

ONE OF THE biggest problems that British and new acts have in the UK is getting their albums generally released and available to their public.

Most of the British acts get over this by having albums and cassettes available at gigs and, as they play regularly in different parts of the country, they gradually cover the whole area, but for visiting acts from abroad, or British acts that do not regularly play the club scene, this outlet is not so readily available.

With this in mind Pat Tynan, former general manager of MCA, decided to launch a new label simply called PT to cater for such quality acts. "I have to believe in the act and they have to be prepared to play in Britain to promote the release," said Tynan.

He started with Pinto Bennett and the Famous Motel Cowboys, and the act came from nowhere to play major spots at both the Wembley and Peterborough festivals. A second album, Big In

Winnemacca, followed within six months. This month the band is back again and a third album, this one actually recorded by the existing band, is being released to coincide with the current tour. Texas based Lore and the Legends are another act PT released last autumn.

Currently British duo Two Hearts are on a tour of civic centres around Britain and Two Hearts One Lover has been released to tie up with it. Although basically country, the label does release other forms of music and British blues act Michael Messer's Diving Duck is one of them.

Asked how the first year went, Tynan is cautious but positive: "The results are steady sales on a weekly basis and we've made positive inroads with media and dealers who realise that our major aim is to develop good quality new artists."

Assisting Tynan in A and R and public relations is Tony Byworth, who explained the future policy. "We have releases soon from Ted Hawkins, Richard Dobson, Belinda Bowler and Cris Wall. Also we will be putting out a compilation of the best of Wes McGehee and have also lined up a deal with Savannah Records which includes some of Canada's most popular acts. In a small way we are developing into a truly international label."

London-based PT Records are distributed nationally by PRT Records.

Another new label was also announced in Nashville at the end of last year by Jimmy Bowen, of MCA Records Inc. The label will be Universal Records and he has already signed the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, Carl Perkins, Roger Whittaker, Lacy J Dalton, Eddy Raven and Eddie Rabbit. It is also understood that The Judds will be joining as soon as their current deal ends. It is not known yet if their records will be released for the UK market.

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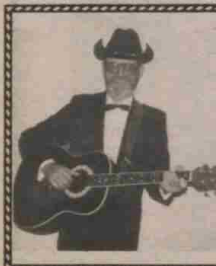
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Getting the mixture right

THE TITLE may sound tacky, but Dollywood is a theme park of superb quality based on mountain life in the 1800s and there can be no doubt about why it was situated where it is... the Smoky Mountains are the biggest asset any theme park could ever wish for.

Last year Dollywood attracted more than two million visitors, but to put that in perspective more than ten million visited the Smoky Mountains, America's most popular national park, so there is still a large audience to tap without having to draw more tourists to the area.

The park opens May to October. What makes it unique is that it is really a working crafts museum covering all sorts of arts and crafts from leather work, to wood carving and glass blowing, plus another 20 century-old crafts that are featured each day. They even have an old relation of Dolly's showing how to make lye soap.

There are some excellent rides for adults and older children, a splendid area for the younger children and a five-mile steam train ride around the whole park. Then there is Dolly's museum, for which there is always a queue, and everywhere you go you will hear music; not just recordings of Dolly Parton, but also live shows, with around five stages featuring up to 20 shows per day. There is superb gospel, some

bluegrass, all the latest country charts and much more. Some of the stages are in the open air, some under cover and others inside.

Dolly does not live on site, but she has an office there and takes an active part in organising and running the park, but they have got the shack she was raised in on site. They have extended the back porch to make it the Parson's Back Porch Theatre and The Kinfolks. Randy and Frieda Parton, play there every day.

Every day, except Saturday, the main show is the Jamboree Show and this takes place in the Barnwood Theatre. If that is not enough music, they have just opened the Celebrity Theatre where top American country stars play every night, names like the Osmond Brothers, Ricky Skaggs, Tammy Wynette, Bellamy Brothers and, just to keep it in the family, Stella Parton.

Usually with Dolly you expect things to be over the top, but this certainly is not the case with her theme park. The food on sale is not just the hot dogs and hamburgers you expect, but lots of home cooking. Many of the souvenirs are made on site and practically all made in America. If you are looking for something different you can pan for gold or throw tomahawks.

Dollywood is sited in Pigeon Forge, a town with a population of 2,800, but with nearly 5,000 motel beds plus numerous camp sites. It also is the home of many other types of entertainment. The Great Passion Play is the largest outdoor production of its kind in the world, set in 115 acres, with a stage of seven-and-a-half acres, a cast of 250 and seating capacity of 4,000.



RICKY SKAGGS

Easter treats at Wembley

THIS YEAR sees the 21st anniversary of Mervyn Conn presenting country music at the Wembley Arena over the Easter holiday. Others have tried in the past to take his place as top presenter of country music outside the USA but none has managed to last the course for so long.

The reason for that success is that Conn has always been more prepared to listen to what the fans have been saying than what the industry and the PRs claim is the latest craze. His view is simply that they are the ones that have to spend their money and they will only spend on acts they want to see, not the ones they are told they should see.

This probably explains why one of the most successful acts to appear at his festivals as far as attendances and audience reaction has been concerned has been Boxcar Willie, who the major recording labels have totally ignored.

Boxie is there again on the opening show on the Saturday along with Tammy Wynette, another act the British fans have always been fond of, and one of Wembley's favourite sons, Bobby Bare. Conn, does not, however, ignore the newer country acts and this line-up sees Larry Boone and Rosie Flores repre-

senting them along with comedy specialists Pinkard and Bowden and Ireland's Bill Conlon.

An Irishman, Mick Flavin, also opens the show on the Sunday with stars Buck Owens, Janie Fricke and Susan McCann as headliners. Billy Walker is always popular. The Stonemans will represent the traditional side and Keith Whitley and Suzy Bogguss the newer names.

Monday sees the show for the contemporary country fans headed by Waylon Jennings and wife Jessie Colter. The excellent Earl Thomas Conley plays the festival for the first time and there is the exciting western swing of Asleep At The Wheel plus the young country approach of The Wagoners, the cult music of Townes Van Zandt and finally Kimmie Rhodes.

As always the shows are being filmed for later screening on BBC2 and, at the time of writing, extra names still had to be confirmed. I have attended most of the shows over the years and this one looks to have a reasonable balance of all styles of country.

Either before or after the Wembley dates many of the acts will be appearing in various countries throughout Europe and this year the Best of British Country Music has been reinstated at the main Wembley location.

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