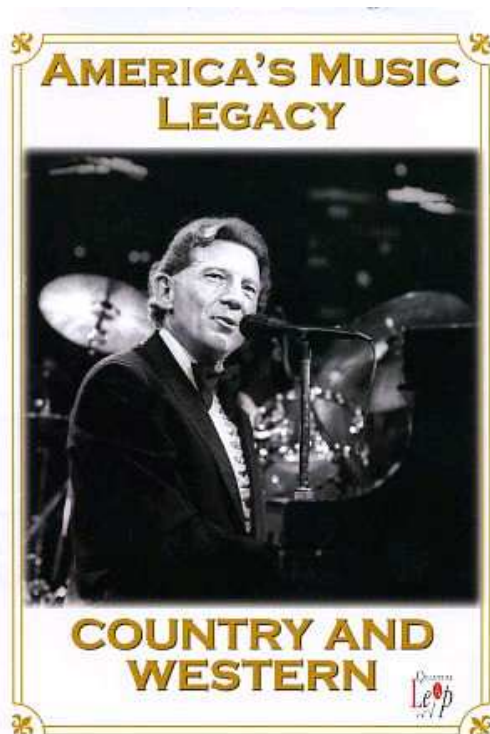


FAME Review: Various Artists - Country & Western (DVD)



America's Music Legacy: Country & Western

Various Artists

Quantum Leap Records - QLDVD 7178 (DVD)

Available from [MVD Entertainment Group](#).

A review written for the Folk & Acoustic Music Exchange
by **Mark S. Tucker**
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Well, first of all, this extravaganza was filmed in the mid-80s at Knott's Berry Farm, which tickled me pink. Then, there was the claim that some guy named Razy Bailey was a "country superstar". Um, anyone remember that name? Anyone at all? Hands? No? Neither do I, so that tickled me as well. Apparently, though, the guy started professionally recording at age 10 and racked up a number of #1 hits, so I guess it just goes to show what I (don't) know. Then there was new star Sylvia—not Sylvia Tyson, just some young prototype for Tanya Tucker all gussied up. Don't recall her name either, do you? Well, once you catch her opening the show, you'll know why.

However, once past her and Razy, you get the real thing: Eddie Dean, Doug Kershaw, Patti Page, Ricky Skaggs, several others, and even Jerry Lee Lewis...er, whom we rockers don't really recall being touted too heavily as a country kinda guy, but what the hell? He hits *Memphis Tennessee* and *I'm Walking at the End of the Road*, so we'll give him the benefit of the doubt. 'Sides, he's redneck, and that counts for a lot. Actually, historically, Lewis ditched rock 'n roll for country when his career at the former was plummeting, though one can't help but notice that his country was pretty heavy on the rock slant.

The Ragin' Cajun, Doug Kershaw, makes his usual quirky, hi-energy, eccentric appearance, starting with *Diggy Diggy Li*, *Diggy Diggy Lo*, and you just can't keep your eyes off this guy. He's as dynamic as Lewis and in him the difference between playing a violin and a fiddle is clearly seen. Raw, ragged, and rough-ridin', Kershaw's nonetheless as supple as velvet in working that instrument every which way. You have to watch him perform to understand how such violently opposed contrasts reconcile so beautifully. No one, but no one, manhandles that four-stringed raspbox like Kershaw. Apt, then, that the "Singing Rage of any Age", Patti Page, the Doris Day of country music, followed up, mellowing down but adding her own smooth pepper. Page's set is jazzier, much more MOR, and the latter quality made her one of music's all-time best-selling singers. Besides, hearing country sidemen getting jazzy is a cool experience in itself.

Jerry Lee gets the longest set, albeit divided up here, and starts out stern as a polecat in a bear trap, but, man, that ol' boogie-woogie piano of his! This guy has never, that I've seen, delivered even a middling performance. I mean, he plays the unliving bejeezus out of a mean set of ivories over and above that trademark hillbilly yelp. One must suspect it's through him that white audiences in America really came to understand what the black piano-playing geniuses in stride and boogie were doing. More than once, Lewis inserts some off-tempo Chuck Berry-type improvs as well, showing that he isn't just comping his own charts. On the other hand, his version of *You Belong to Me* is as raggedy as Willie would make it.

Ricky Skaggs is pretty much the prime exponent of modern country, and he turns in a set that's a skosh more symphonic than the others, appearing with a great backing band. Like Page, he knows how attractive MOR sweetening is to the latter-day country crowd, tailoring it to dovetail hand in glove to the bouncy tunes he prefers to pen. And by the time this DVD is over, you've a good taste of just what happened when country—influenced by the ongoingly successful rock and roll—began to turn the page. More, you get a look back, from time to time, in short glances, of what Knott's used to look like. I went there several times as a SoCal kid, and, man, what memories that look-back ushers in. It sure as hell ain't nuthin' like that t'day, Hezekiah!

This is one two DVDs issued simultaneously in the America's Music Legacy project. For a review of the other disc, see Gospel ([here](#)).

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