

<http://ffanzeen.blogspot.com/2010/12/dvd-reviews-two-of-americas-music.html>

## **America's Music Legacy: Country and Western**

*Directed by Gene Weed*

*Cube International / Century Home Video, 1981 / 2010*

*115 minutes, USD \$16.95*

*Cubeinternational.com*

*Qleap.co.uk*

*MVDvisual.com*

The program itself was originally titled *Countrystyle*. Considering the wide range covered, that seems pretty appropriate. This show, mounted at the Knotts Berry Farm Theater in California, is externally hosted (he's filmed at various park spots and then spliced inbetween) by Gene Weed (d. 1999), who did the same honors for the short-lived television series *Shiveree*, and was director for ABC's coverage of *Live Aid* (he was part of Dick Clark's company).

Starting with the young and fresh, the show opens with Sylvia (Kirby), who is one of the first "new country" artists (similarly along the lines of Juice Newton), when country starting becoming as much about pop music. She performs two of her early hits (well, I guess then-current), starting with "Drifter," which went to No. 1 on the country charts. She follows up with the really awful "The Matador," a pandering audience sing-along mess, which is due more to the song than the singer. However, she is apparently enjoying herself up on stage, though now nearly 30 years later, she's a life coach rather than a performer. Heck, this disk did not even list her in the bios section!

The first to unofficially represent the '70s period, the last bastion before the rise of "country pop," is Razy Bailey, whose style reminds me of the likes of Larry Gatlin, with "Lovin' Up a Storm" and "She Left Love All Over Me." He also does the classic "Nightlife," a Willie Nelson boogie blues ballad.

Eddie Dean (d. 1991) has been around since the '30s, first making appearances singing in Roy Rogers westerns and the like. He certainly stands out in his bright yellow two-piece outfit. I swear, C+W musicians have *the* loudest clothes of all music genres, and I won't even go into the tassels (or *tzitzit*, as my parent may have called them). Anyway, Dean sings some songs he has been known for, such as the traditional cowboy tune from yon, "Wagon Wheels" (which has a similar feel to "Tumbling Tumbleweeds"). He follows this with the (I'm) cheatin' hit of his, "One Has My Name (One Has My Heart)", written by Dean and his wife. This song is so classic and timeless. Then there's another Dean-penned number, "Hillbilly Heaven," which is a bluegrass ballad that reminds me in theme of the Righteous Brothers' (worst) song, "Rock and Roll Heaven." It takes us on a name dropping tour of all the people in hillbilly music that died, and even those to follow! Dean is definitely ol' time country, and is fun to watch.

What can one say about Doug Kershaw, the "Ragin' Cajun"? He is pure entertainer, with his fiddle in hand (but rarely under neck); he plays nothing but toe tappin', foot stompin',

yeeee-haaaaaw Cajun-style bluegrass. Considering the way he handles the fiddle, could one call him the Hendrix of the instrument? Well, maybe that's overstepping, but the cat can play. He performs two of his big hits, "Diggy Diggy Hi, Diggy Diggy Low" and "Louisiana Man," as well as Hank Williams' "Jambalaya." Or should I say, of *course* he does that song, considering he comes *from* the bayou (his dad was an alligator hunter). He is obviously having fun, with the audience, about the previous performers, with the cameras, and especially the music. He is quite comfortable dancing around the stage while playing, and it's catching.

Sadly, one of the few real disappointments on this collection is the wonderful Clara Ann Fowler, better known as (Miss) Patti Page. Oh, the woman can sing, and even though her big hit, "Tennessee Waltz" was recorded in 1950, she still has the pipes that made her famous, without missing a note. Great voice. The problem for me is the presentation. He puts absolutely no soul into most of the songs, such as Willie Nelson's "On the Road Again," "Please Release Me" (made famous in the US by Englebert Humperdink), and a bizarre cover of John Hartford's "Gentle on My Mind," where she takes the position of the woman he left behind, presenting it in a classic hetero-normative stance (yes, I know C+W is conservative, but...). She sings these songs both bouncy and flouncy, like she's barely *present*, or as a lounge singer may. Absolutely no stage presence at all. However! She does a pretty good job on a *new* song for her at the time, "No Aces," and actually has a nice tenderness for her classic "Waltz."

Moe Bandy started out in the rodeo, and after moving into music it's a topic he still comes back to often. In fact, his first big hit, played here, is "Bandy the Rodeo Clown." He also does the like-minded "It's a Cheatin' Situation" and "Cowboys Ain't Supposed to Cry," both of which are rodeo related. His milieu is the weepy storyline of heartbreak and sadness, and he continues that theme with "Take Me Back to Yesterday Once More" (why do C+W titles tend to be so long?). His music has lots of steel-string wah-wah.

The next performer is the only person who could comfortably fit on most DVD categories in this series, without changing his material all that much. Jerry Lee Lewis moved comfortably into C+W and gospel after his rock and roll career was cut short in 1959, with his influence felt both from and to the varied genres. And, as always, he does not hold back. Whether blasting through the rock and roll boogie of "I'm Rockin' My Life Away" and "Great Balls of Fire," or the more traditional bluegrass boogie of "I'm Walkin' at the End of the Road" and "I Trusted in You" (the flipside of the "Great Balls" 45), he covers all the bases. It's also interesting that he invokes himself in third person in nearly every song. Do I really need to tell you 'bout the Killer, one of the more exciting entertainers in the last 50 years?

Once in the rock band Fire and Ice, Terry Gregory brings that energy to country (well, new country) with the silly "Marie LaVoe" (a swamp witch who likes to make "another man done gone"). She moves around the stage, struttin' and squattin' as if she was still rockin', but it definitely works for her. Her second song, "Can't Say Goodbye," is a break-up ballad that's more pop than country. She is nicely expressive in her presence, and has a decent voice.

He's now a legend (his list of awards in the bio area go on for pages), and it's clear to see why. Ricky Skaggs is the final new performer here, and he covers a bunch of his traditional-influenced country crooning with the (again) heartbreakers "Get Your Heart Broke," "You May See Me Walking," and "I'm Cryin' My Heart Out Over You." Skaggs has been a major fixture in both the country and rock (e.g., the White Stripes, Bruce Hornsby) scene for decades now.

For some reason, we return to Terry Gregory, though it's obvious this clip is actually from the earlier set, where she covers Tammy Wynette's "Stand By Your Man." Terry does have a good voice and charm, but she is no match for Wynette's version, when it comes to pacing, intonation and inflection.

And then, again, there is Jerry Lee (also from the earlier set), where he brings down the house with the history of rock'n'roll, covering Chuck Berry's "Memphis, Tennessee," his own "A Whole Lot of Shakin' Goin' On," and as an encore, an abbreviation of Little Richard's "Good Golly Miss Molly."

Covering traditional, neo-traditional, bluegrass, Cajun, and new country, among others, this wide covering makes this a nicely handled package.