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Alice Cooper: Weird May Not Be Beautiful But It Sure Is Strange

by Bob Moore Merlis

I was there before it all began to happen big for the ACs, as I like to call them. Sometime before the *Love It to Death* album was released and before "Eighteen" became a teenage—what would you expect with a title like that—smash, I saw Alice and the lads at Max's Kansas City. Some friends from France were visiting and I was reviewing for a well known trade magazine so I brought them along. When Alice came out made up to be killed and started smashing his mike stand with a hammer singing "Sun Arise" (the old Rolf Harris Down-under hit), I thought they'd die but, to my surprise, they dug it completely. My French friends were, as it turned out, theater freaks rather than your run of the mill rock and roll buffs (they've all since graduated from pharmacy school).

Can You Top This?

Having seen the Stooges the week before, I had gone into Max's feeling it would take something really powerful to impress me. After all, hadn't Iggy actually puked while performing at Ungano's (this is not to say that others hadn't vomited in that hallowed rock dungeon but I'm sure nobody had thought to do it on stage until Iggy broke the ice)? How could this upstart top Iggy's regurgitation routine for sheer theatrical excitement? Easily, I soon found out. When Alice started dancing around wearing a giant carton on his head and torso (similar in effect to the Old Gold dancing cigarette packs on TV in the 50s) I knew that I had found the ultimate in far out, yet nifty, theatrical rock and roll. His "Nobody Likes Me" schtick sung

through Dutch doors was the clincher and I was an Alice Cooper fan for life. It seemed to me that anybody can look good in a daring decollete but Alice wasn't just another pretty body—this guy was real art!



Beer-Drinking Man

Later I actually met Alice when his manager brought him to the trade magazine for an interview and some hype on his single. I must say that I was more than favorably impressed by the personable Mr. Cooper, who artfully used his can of Budweiser as a prop through the course of the interview. He told me that television was the biggest influence on his career and I immediately knew that I had found a true



soul brother (or sister, in this case).

Eventually Alice Cooper became a household word in several hundred thousand households as a result of the success of "Eighteen" and the group was booked to play Town Hall. I was eager with anticipation days before the gig. "Will success spoil Alice Cooper?" I wondered to myself. The day finally came and the act they put on was nothing short of masterful, with fantastic props: an electric chair, boa constrictor, straight jacket and nurse dressed in white, and great music. Rock and roll, hard and fast, pure and simple—the kind you'd be almost willing to pay to hear on your AM car radio if you could.

Props a-Plenty

More recently the Academy of Music was the setting for another milestone in Alice Cooper's collective career. It was time for Alice to debut a new act, dubbed *Killer*, the same as the new album. As ever, props played an important role in the concert and the collection this time was mind-blowing. An incomplete list follows: bubble machine, smoke machine, hatchet, top hat, bowler (donated by an enthusiastic member of the audience), torn leotards, a white cutaway (tails), cute little doll (for the bizarre "Dead Babies" sequence), the boa (who looked well-fed as ever), whip, a great number of *Killer* calendars (courtesy of Warner Bros., no doubt) which were donated to the throbbing masses and, the piece de resistance: a true-to-life-and-death gallows.

As Alice mounted the gallows*, the smoke machine went crazy. The trap opened and Alice really looked as if he'd just gotten his just deserts as he twirled at the end of the rope. Blinding lightning flashes and deafening thunder (someone called it the condensed soundtrack album of World War II, starring the original cast) kept the media mixed—or all shook up.



But what's this? As the smoke clears, Alice is back sporting a white topper and tails to match and the band rocks out again. The anti-Christ is resurrected and we boogie again. More calendars are thrown into the audience and pandemonium breaks out. Curtain.

BUT IT'S STILL NOT OVER!

A far out rock and roll show, an execution, a resurrection: **ALL THIS AND AN ENCORE, TOO!?** Yup, he came back to sing "Under My Wheels," the new single, one more time. Alice is, as they say in the biz, a great example of "promotion in motion."

We love you, Alice. Keep on keepin' on. We'll be glad to watch you die anytime.

*A note of explanation: *Killer* is a kind of crypto-morality play in which Alice plays a demented (it should come as no surprise) baby killer (that's where the hatchet comes in—and out—my wife didn't dig that part too much), who is sentenced to hang by the neck until dead.

Tom Rapp: Some Truths About Some Lies

Tom Rapp/Pearls Before Swine
... beautiful lies you could live in
(Reprise RS 6467)

"Snow Queen," "A Life," "Butterflies," "Simple Things," "Everybody's Got Pain," "Bird on a Wire," "Island Lady," "Come to Me," "Freedom," "She's Gone," "Epitaph."

What's the Pearls Before Swine motto?

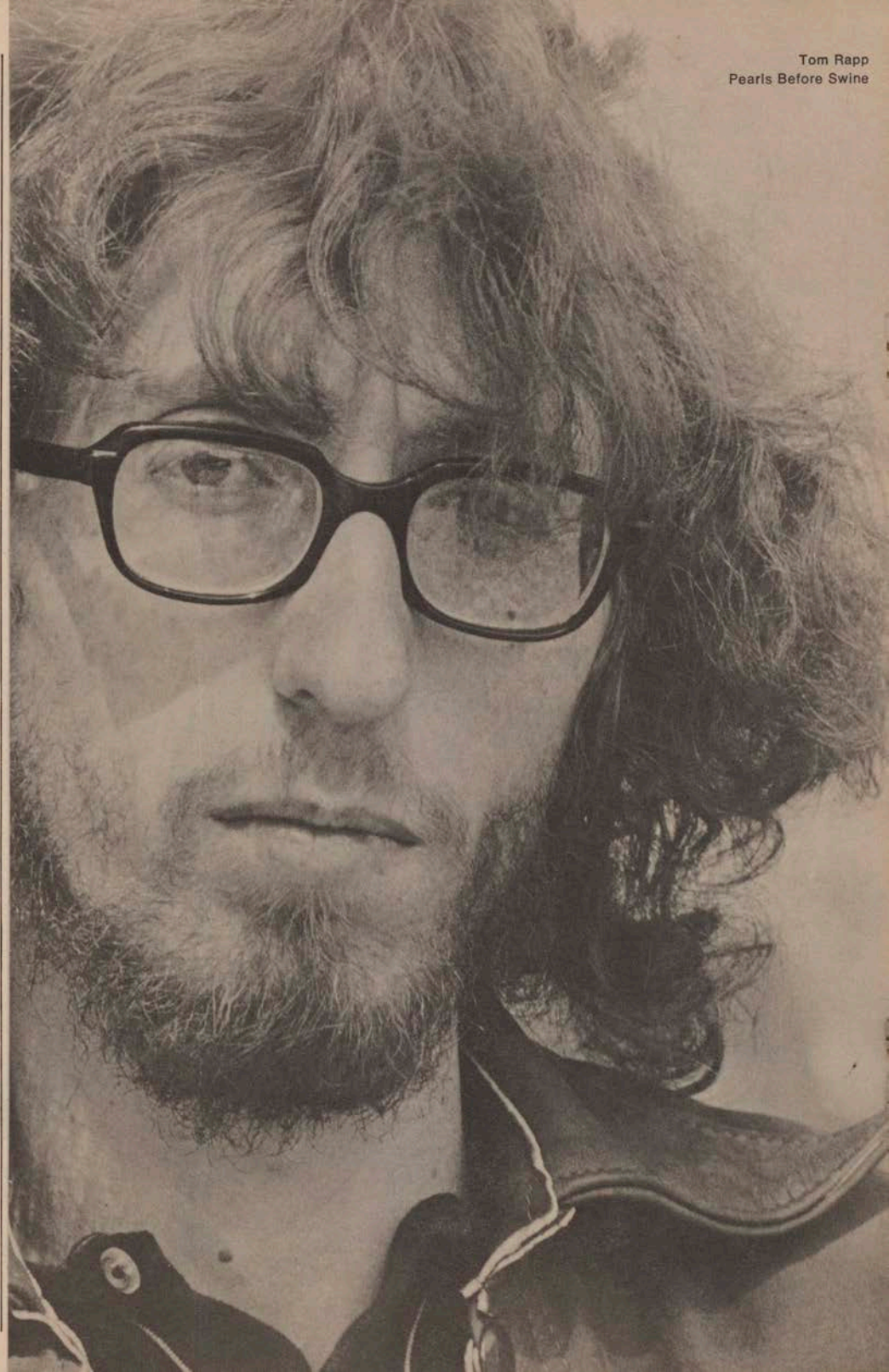
"If you can't be universal, you should at least be ambiguous," says Tom Rapp with an ambiguous smile.

And like the preceding five, Pearls' new album, ... *beautiful lies you could live in*, is sure to delight any lover of ambiguity (or ambiguous lover) from the title (why "in" and not "with"?) to the cover painting by John Everett Millais of a lady, who could be Ophelia or the Lady of Shallot or maybe someone else entirely, floating in a lake (or pond or river), her waterlogged dress a maze of squiggly patterns that beg for a microscope. (Will the golden curls of Tom himself be revealed therein? Whose pale nose and eyes peer out of the greenery?)

More than Ambiguous

But the songs inside are more than ambiguous. They're, well, universal—songs that are sometimes very personal and specific yet touch upon the experiences of just about anyone who might be listening.

"The themes reflect more interpersonality," says Tom, "I having become more of an interperson. They are less often generalized cosmological epics of introspection and more often like short stories, in which the leading character is a human being in the universe rather than the universe itself."



Tom's songs dwell more on the somber side of the life of a human being in the universe than on the merry. They're more likely to set you pondering than snapping your fingers. They capture subtle feelings and delicate changes in a few perfect images (for example, "The gentle poetry of fingertips. The verses drifted apart in the spring. Lingering verses remain within," from "Freedom").

But sometimes they mix strange and unpredictable emotional brews. In "Everybody's Got Pain" voices and instruments produce the appropriate harsh, tense, pained sound, but you can tell they're having a great time doing it. (Does pain get better when you get together and sing about it?) "The Clock Has Metal Hands" or "A Life" is about the remorseless passing of any human life, but there is an underlying sense of hope and humor.

Out of the Shells

It used to be that the Pearls emerged from their respective oysters only every few months or so to make a record. This mysterious, non-performing seclusion gave rise to some bizarre myths about the group: that Tom Rapp was a leper or a hunchback, for example, and that there was a dwarf in the band.

Now all that's changed. Pearls have come out into the larger oyster of the universe, and the experience has been nothing short of a revelation.

"We are meeting our listeners for the first time," says Tom, "and finding them astounding, kind and beautiful." Typical of Pearls' listeners (if any one of them in their infinite variety can be said to be typical) are the girl who deposited a hand-made crystal swan on stage and then "furtively ducked into the darkness" and the audiences who sing along knowing every word of every song.

For Tom performing is a kind of mystical communion with the audience, the chance to share with thousands from Amsterdam to Boston to Michigan the kind of love that most of us have with only a very few.

"The concert performance is the macrocosmic love situation," he says. "At a point soon after the performer and the audience see each other in the necessary ritual a leap of intimacy is made, and for as long as it can be sustained a state of grace exists on that spot."

And the state of grace feeds back, spills over into the writing and recording of the songs.

The group, now consisting of Robbie Merkin on piano, Morrie Brown, bass, David Wolfert, guitar, and Tom, vocals and guitar, have just recorded their first deliberate single, "Grace Street," which represents "a chance to create from some bitterness and self-uncertainty something which other people will perhaps experience as a few moments of beauty."

And that, Tom will tell you, is what it's all about.

Rock and Roll Is Here to Stay

Cash Box, an observant record trade paper, noticed an interesting pattern in its chart listings last week and assembled the elements of the pattern in the following article, which *Circular* reprints intact:

NEW YORK—"Rock 'n' roll," both the term and the musical form, has seen a marked chart resurgence in recent weeks.

While its musical legacy is now simply referred to as "rock," the original term coined in the 50's is cropping up in charted titles, along with frequent musical references to its earlier sound.

Three items on the Top 100 singles chart combine both kinds of references: Ten Years After's "Baby Won't You Let Me Rock 'N' Roll You" (#90, Columbia); Edgar Winter's "Keep On Playin' That Rock 'N' Roll" (bulleted at #72, Epic) and "Rock 'N' Roll" by Detroit, (#97, Paramount). Another example of the use of the term in a title is Traffic's latest single, "Rock 'N' Roll Stew" (Island) currently listed as Looking Ahead.

The number one album and single, Don McLean's "American Pie" (United Artists) relates the

effect of such early rock 'n' roll figures as Buddy Holly on the singer/songwriter's life. Also on the charts are various revivals of early sixties classics: Roberta Flack's re-make of the Shirelles' "Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow" (bulleted at #83, Atlantic); The Robert John Treatment of the Tokens' hit, "The Lion Sleeps Tonight" (bulleted at #45, Atlantic); Del Shannon's "Runaway" re-done as part of the new Dawn medley "Runaway/Happy Together" (bulleted at #62 in its Top 100 debut, Bell); Donny Osmond's "Hey Girl," originally recorded by Freddie Scott (#19, MGM).

On the Top 100 LP chart, an entire LP of r&b's contribution to rock 'n' roll performed by Laura Nyro and Labelle is ranked at #63 (Columbia). On the Paul McCartney/Wings LP, "Wild Life" (Apple, #6) there is a re-make of the Mickey & Sylvia hit, "Love Is Strange," and Nilsson has revived the Shirley & Lee tune, "Let The Good Times Roll" on his "Nilsson Schmilsson" LP (#79, RCA).

An early hit for Danny & The Juniors (ABC Paramount) claimed that "Rock And Roll Is Here To Stay." And so it appears today.

Items

Direct from Hollywood

★ Lassie and her series co-star, Pamelyn Ferdin, will guest on *The Dating Game* television show. Lassie will choose a date for Pamelyn by barking the number of the winning bachelor.

Tropical Trek

★ The Warner/Reprise National Promo Meeting will take place in the grueling hot sun and clammy surf of Acapulco from February 27 through March 2. Sixty promotion men and their National Director Ron Saul will keep their noses to the tropical grindstone deep in Mexico's resort because, says a promotional spokesman, "we wanted a place with an atmosphere conducive to hard work."

Little Flips

★ Little Richard's latest single is being re-serviced to radio folk with a newly designated A side—"Money Runner" from the \$ soundtrack.



By popular demand. The first A side was "Money Is," from the same soundtrack.

Sebastian Scion

★ John and Catherine Sebastian are parents, via the miracle of natural childbirth, of little Ben, 20 inches long when he was born January 13 at Cedars of Lebanon hospital in Los Angeles. That must be why John has started answering his phone, "Ben's House."

Weir to Come

★ Bob Weir, he of the Grateful Dead and handsome mien, is spending a couple of weeks in Wyoming with his old chum John Barlow. The two of them are writing songs together, which songs will be featured on Bob Weir's first solo album, when he gets around to making it.

No Plain Brown Wrapper

★ *Circular's* careful readers (both of them) will of course recall the *Garcia* album cover controversy, wherein the liquid laminators refused to laminate what they termed the obscene *Garcia* cover. Further fire fueled the flaming furor when certain major record dealers (who

CENSORED

shall be nameless) refused to stock *Garcia* because of its allegedly obscene cover. Today that controversy is history; Warner Bros. is manufacturing some *Garcia* covers that are not obscene, thanks to the airbrushing skills of an anonymous artist. The obscene covers are not being recalled; they can be found and purchased at those record stores specializing in obscene album covers.

Birthday Ballyhoo

★ This week's celebrations include the following musical notables: Ray Stevens (Jan. 24), Joe Smith (Jan. 26), Bobby Blue Bland (Jan. 27) and Artur Rubinstein (Jan. 28).

Inspirational Verse

**There must be a cloud in my head
Rain keeps fallin' from my eyes**

— Dee Clark "Raindrops"

Tacky Tortillas

★ The promotional mind is occasionally the victim of biology, as embarrassed whizzes at Warner Bros. learned in the aftermath of an ingenious stunt for Malo. The San Francisco Latinate group was pushed via tortillas stamped with the title of its new WB album, real tor-



Tortilla After

tillas silk-screened in luscious red ink, mailed out to myriads of people judged to be susceptible to such frummery. For mailing purposes the tropical pastries were sealed in baggies, which kept them moist and flexible and tortilla-like while they wafted through the mails. Alas, the baggies served also as miniature greenhouses for assorted molds which quickly engulfed the emblazoned discs. Some arrived pristine at their destinations, only to fall prey to biology within a day. Some were delayed in the mails. Oh well.

The Day the Music Died

★ Ross Bagdasarian, better known as David Seville (in the company of a trio of speedy chipmunks), died at the age of 52 Jan. 16 in his Beverly Hills home, apparently of natural causes. The nephew of William Saroyan, with whom he co-composed Rosemary Clooney's "Come On-a My House," Bagdasarian enriched American music with such staples as "Witch Doctor" and "The Chipmunk Song," the latter of which is claimed to have sold 4 million copies. He will be missed.

Cassettes Accelerating

★ *Billboard* reports that its studies indicate cassettes overtook open reel tapes, in terms of equipment ownership, in 1971. Specifically, the trade magazine found that of those families owning tape units, 49% own cassette equipment while open reel, the former leader, has dropped to 45.8%. Additionally, 8-track ownership is 32% while 4-track is a mere 2.7%. If you're puzzled by the total in excess of 100% (129.5%), it's due to families owning more than one tape unit. The survey questionnaire, sent to 5,000 families in mid-October, prompted in 4,100 replies (an 82% return). *Billboard* does not say if anyone answered with a talking letter.

Wrong Again

★ *Circular's* last issue was incorrectly coded on the front; it was not Vol. 1 No. 2, it was Vol. 4 No. 2. This is No. 3. It tries even harder. Also in that last issue was a photo of the grateful Dead with Joe Smith and many gold albums. Those gold albums were facsimiles of the Dead's million-selling album, *Grateful Dead*. Those gold albums had nothing to do with *American Beauty*, the Dead's previous and non-gold album.

Sounds of Silence

★ From *Record World* comes this insight into Radio Biz: "A memo came down from headquarters at RKO General Radio last week that effective immediately no programming information would be available for publication from any of the RKO stations. . . . Evidently competition between radio stations is entering a heightened state whereby increased secrecy about playlists seems desirable." The article did not comment on the rumor that RKO program directors now carry cyanide capsules in the event they are captured and tortured for information.

Excising the Exorcist

★ In Dover, Delaware, there's this raging controversy (adjectives courtesy of *The Hollywood Reporter*) over William Peter Blatty's *The Exorcist*; local parents and clergy have demanded that the book be removed from the library, and at a board meeting of a local school one minister, Thorwald Torgersen, refused to allow excerpts from the book read aloud. Torgersen admitted, though, he hadn't read the book because of "a long waiting list at the library." Just be patient.

Future Music

★ Currently cutting up in assorted Los Angeles-area studios, working on albums which will enrich spring and summer for large numbers of



Gordon Lightfoot

people, are Jimmy Webb, Paul Parrish, Little Feat, Gordon Lightfoot, Goldie Hawn, Lamb, Norman Greenbaum and Paul Stookey (who is preparing a single).

Thank God It's History

★ In September of 1958 Warner Bros. made its bid for the popular market with the following LPs: *Terribly Sophisticated Songs* by Henry Mancini, *Have Organ, Will Swing* by Buddy Cole, *The Dixieland Story* by Matty Matlock and *The Smart Set* by The Smart Set.



Late Harvest

★ You're not gonna like this one bit, but the Neil Young Harvest album has been delayed again. Until February 15. Because on that day the federal copyright protection law goes into effect for records and tapes, so Reprise is waiting until then to afford Neil his proper ©. The © is the code which will denote post-February 15 copyright registration and protection.

New Singles

A Horse with No Name

America
WB 7555

Acoustic and harmonic, topped by a vocal reminiscent of Neil Young, this record is hotter than light bulbs in England at this moment, which land has awarded it the Number 3 spot in



America

its singles charts in short order. So wanton is the hysteria attached to this side that it is being hastily stuffed into the just-released here *America* album, much to the dismay of WB's already overworked Stuffing Department. Tough. The song is strong, written by America member Dewey Bunnell, and the sound is grabbing. It all clocks in at 4:10 with nary an undeveloped second.

Forty Lost Brick Blues

Michael Small
(from the sound track of *Dealing*)
WB 7557

Rush is the word for the speed with which this single is being processed into commercially available vinyl. Ignorant is the word to describe the single reviewer's knowledge of what the rushing is all about. Unearthly is one applicable adjective for the sound of the single. Not that it's one whit unpleasant, mind you, it's just that there seems to be an unrevealed story whose trail unfortunately terminates at this review. Mystery, mystery.

Be the One

William Truckaway
REP 1066

An uncomplicated love song done up proud by the roundly talented Mr. Truckaway, "Be the One" is an instant favorite from his delightful *Breakaway* album, released last December. A piano sets the song up with an emphatic rhythm and tantalizing filigrees. Truckaway's voice is doubled or tripled to perfection and additionally fleshed with a chorus of ladies. Nice.



Artist Itineraries

California

Crazy Horse
1/25-30, Troubadour, Los Angeles

Doobie Brothers
1/27, New Monk, Berkeley
1/29, Chateau Liberte, Santa Cruz

Deep Purple
1/28, Swing Auditorium, San Bernardino
1/29, Exposition Center, San Jose
1/30, Long Beach Auditorium, Long Beach

Seals & Crofts
1/28, Santa Monica Civic Auditorium, Santa Monica
1/29, Berkeley Community Theatre, Berkeley

Youngbloods
1/29, Longshoreman's Hall, San Francisco

Colorado

Zephyr
1/24-26, Tulagi's, Boulder

Connecticut

Captain Beefheart & His Magic Band
1/29, Ferris Center, Trinity College, Hartford

Florida

Malo
1/27, Sports Auditorium, Jacksonville
1/29, Sports Auditorium, Hollywood
1/30, Curtis Hixon Theatre, Tampa

Georgia

Malo
1/24, Municipal Auditorium, Atlanta

Kansas

Deep Purple
1/26, Arena, Wichita

Top Ten

Week of January 17-23

1. Alice Cooper/*Killer* (BS 2567)
2. Faces/*A Nod's as Good as a Wink* (BS 2574)
3. Van Morrison/*Tupelo Honey* (WS 1950)
4. Jethro Tull/*Aqualung* (MS 2035)
5. *Summer of '42* soundtrack (WS 1925)
6. Black Sabbath/*Master of Reality* (BS 2562)
7. T. Rex/*Electric Warrior* (RS 6466)
8. James Taylor/*Mudslide Slim* (BS 2561)
9. Fleetwood Mac/*Future Games* (RS 6465)
10. Les Crane/*Desiderata* (BS 2570)

Louisiana

Malo
1/26, Willie Purple's, Baton Rouge
1/28, The Warehouse, New Orleans

Maryland

Alice Cooper
1/30, Civic Center, Baltimore

Massachusetts

Captain Beefheart & His Magic Band
1/28, Paramount Theatre, Springfield

Missouri

Deep Purple
1/24, Kiel Auditorium, St. Louis

Nevada

The First Edition
1/28-2/8 International Hotel, Las Vegas

New York

Gordon Lightfoot
1/28, Philharmonic Hall, New York City

Rhode Island

Captain Beefheart & His Magic Band
1/26, Veterans Memorial Auditorium, Providence

Tennessee

Fanny
1/24, Memphis State Univ., Memphis

Texas

Fanny
1/28-30, Liberty Ballroom, Houston

Washington

Jeffrey Cain
1/25-29, Iron Bowl, Bellingham

Canada

Jim Kweskin
1/25-30, Riverboat, Toronto, Ontario