

AMERICA'S NUMBER ONE COUNTRY PUBLICATION

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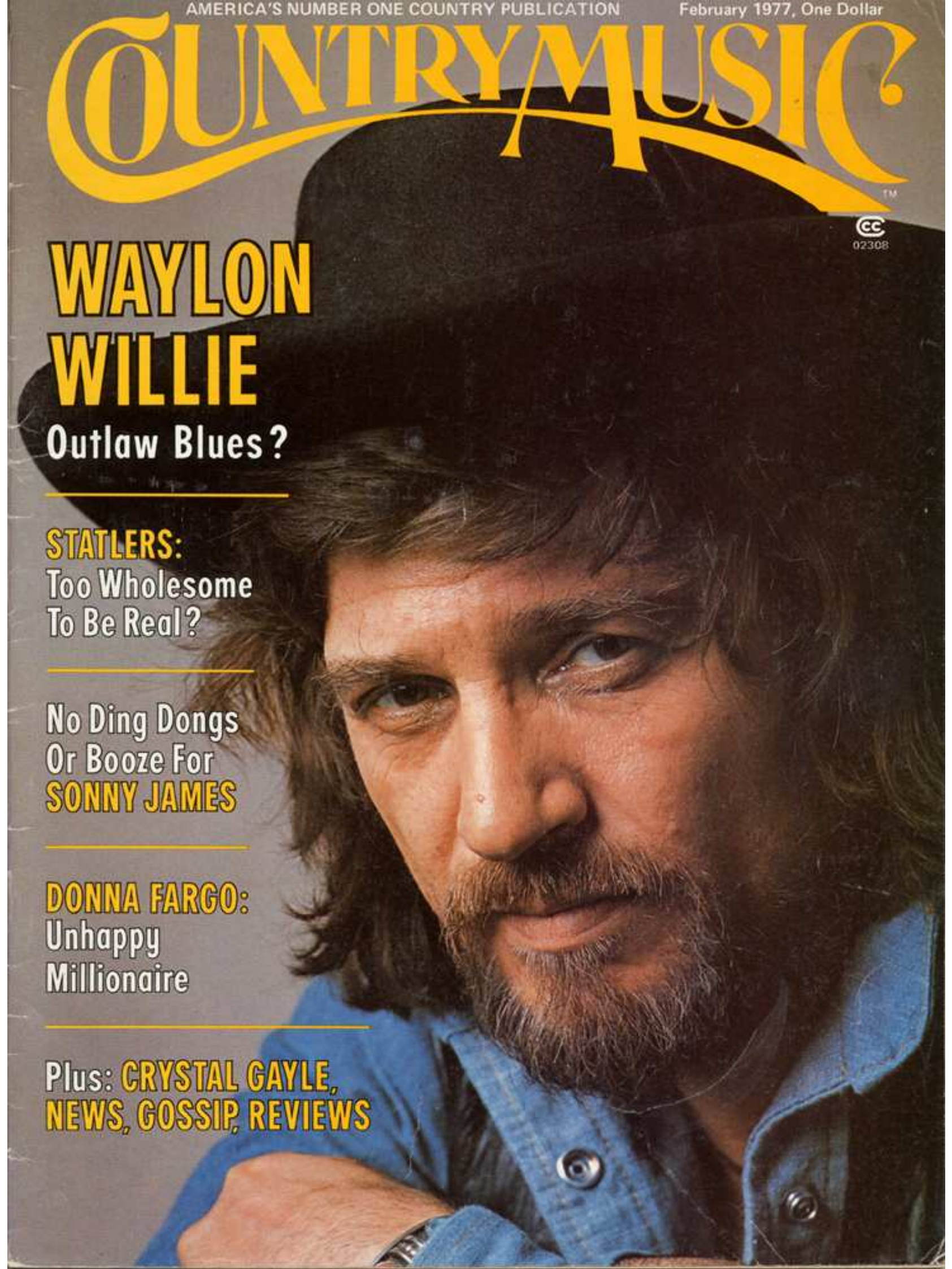
Outlaw Blues?

STATLERS:
Too Wholesome
To Be Real?

No Ding Dongs
Or Booze For
SONNY JAMES

DONNA FARGO:
Unhappy
Millionaire

Plus: **CRYSTAL GAYLE,**
NEWS, GOSSIP, REVIEWS



RISING STAR AWARD

Crystal Gayle is our newest Rising Star. With the help of producer Allen Reynolds, Crystal has permanently shed the image of Loretta Lynn's baby sister and gone on to become one of the most promising young singers on the country and pop charts.

Crystal Gayle

Young country on the way up

by VALERIE RIDENOUR

Not surprisingly, Crystal Gayle is tired-worn out.

"I've been on the road constantly this last year," she says, sounding not the least bit exhausted as she begins studio work on her next album. "I can only think of one weekend off during the whole year—well, that's not really true. I did take two weeks off this summer."

But the weariness of the road is tempered by a distinct air of excitement—this is, according to both Crystal and her manager/producer Allen Reynolds, her year for success; the year Loretta Lynn's little sister comes of age.

Success never comes easy, and for the sons and daughters and brothers and sisters of the famous, success comes all that much harder. There is, intended or unintended, a constant comparison; a constant pitting of one artist against another where, in the usual case, the least experienced comes out the loser.

More than any other brother/sister/son/daughter in recent years, Crystal Gayle has managed to avoid the pitfalls of an older sister's coattails. Which has been, she says, a conscious decision on the part of both her and Loretta.

"Well, I'll always be her little sister," Crystal says, laughing at the question she must answer at least a dozen times a day. "I'm not trying to do away with it, but I am glad that people are taking me for my own music."

That music is as different from the Kentucky twang of a coal miner's daughter

as the flatlands of Wabash, Indiana, are from the simmering coal mines of Butcher Holler. It is, on the one hand, a softer music, less tied to the hard times and poverty of her older sister's youth. Smoother, owing a greater debt to the styles of such childhood idols as Leslie Gore and Brenda Lee rather than the traditional icons of the Grand Ole Opry. More akin to, say, Olivia Newton-John and Linda Ronstadt, than her famous sister.

In a word, commercial.

But what separates Crystal Gayle's music from the hundreds of other young female country singers with a wary eye on the pop charts is her superb voice, a honey-smooth instrument that flows easily from the innocence of country to the sultriness of bar blues.

That quality, at least, she shares with sister Loretta—that ability to make a song better than it has any right to be; to make the listener feel, rather than hear, the song.

Take, for instance, her first real shot in the limelight, *This Is My Year For Mexico*. The song, a deceptively forlorn little ballad by one of Nashville's best—if unrecognized—talents, Vince Matthews, suited Crystal and producer Allen Reynolds to a tee. Her voice projected the pain of a woman trapped in a relationship and left only with fantasy trips to Mexico with simplicity and pathos. It was the kind of song that got under one's skin, and managed to get under enough skins to boost Crystal solidly onto the national

charts. That voice was convincing.

Quick follow-ups with *Somebody Loves You*, a catchy, uptempo piece of fluff, and a more expansive (and perhaps overdone) vocal arrangement of *I'll Get Over You* added to the momentum, and, like the proverbial snowball rolling down a mountain, Crystal Gayle was off and running.

"You know, when you first get started in this business, no songwriters will send you or give you anything. And I can understand that—they want bigger artists to record their material," she says. "So it's really rough to get into the business. Now once you're established, they'll knock your doors off."

We both laugh. Pretty soon, I say, you'll have to get an unlisted phone and change your address.

"Then everybody'll talk about how accessible Crystal Gayle used to be," she adds, chuckling. "Anyway, it's so nice."

Crystal—born Brenda Gail Webb—was a sure bet to be a country singer. From singing along with Leslie Gore records in her back yard, she moved while still in junior high to touring with Loretta during the summers. Having a sister in country music—even a sister who was already married and moved out of the house by the time Crystal was born—was more than a big incentive. It went a long way toward opening a few doors. It was Loretta who wrote Crystal's first hit, *I Cried The Blue Right Out Of My Eyes*, and who suggested her sister change her name to

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Photo: Steven Boyd

CRYSTAL GAYLE

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avoid being confused with Brenda Lee.

Perhaps her greatest stroke of luck was not as having Loretta Lynn as her big sister, but as having Allen Reynolds as her producer.

"He's the best friend I have in the industry," she says. "Larry Butler (the head of United Artists'—Crystal's record label—country division) put us together. He thought Allen and I would get along well, and we have. There are a whole lot of people in Nashville you really can't run out and trust, but I could tell Allen wasn't that type of person from the first."

His biggest contributions have been the careful choice of material and a delicate touch with production, all with an eye toward the omnipresent pop charts. Mention having a country record go pop—a crossover—and it's guaranteed to bring a wince. There is usually a string of denials, an absolute pledge of allegiance to the purity of country music and a disgusted shunning of the money—and we're talking about literally millions of dollars—that a crossover record can mean.

Crystal Gayle is potentially a crossover artist—a big crossover artist—and discussing that with her is something akin to walking on eggs.