

# Top bluegrass musicians honored by SPBGMA

The Country Gentlemen were the big winners when the bluegrass world came to Opryland in January for the eleventh annual Society of the Preservation of Bluegrass Music in America (SPBGMA) Bluegrass Music Awards.

The 4,500 fans who attended the three-day event saw the Country Gentlemen, 25 year veterans of the bluegrass scene, emerge as top vote getters, individually and collectively, in five categories, including Best Band Overall.

Last Kansas Exit from Lawrence, Kan., outlasted 70 other bluegrass groups to capture the SPBGMA International Championships, held concurrently at the Opryland Hotel.

SPBGMA members, now numbering more than 7,000 families, voted on 30 award categories ranging from publications to songwriters. Notable winners included Jerry Douglas of The Whites for dobro; Doyle Lawson and Quicksilver for vocal band; Tony Rice for lead guitar; Rhonda Vincent of the Sally Mountain Show for female traditional vocalist; and the Johnson Mountain Boys for traditional bluegrass band.

That several of the attractive golden figures, including Album of the Year to the Bluegrass Brigade and Top Contemporary Band to the Tennessee Gentlemen, went to acts little



Roland White

## Another Country



Art  
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known outside the Midwest raised some eyebrows in Nashville.

SPGBMA Director Chuck Stearman feels that the awards accurately reflect the preferences of the members, 75 percent of whom live in the Midwest. "Our programs rarely include major groups from the East. We have to use local talent, and our Midwestern people vote for their own bands . . . We're starting to gain membership in the East. We're attempting to become truly national awards. That will take years to achieve."

In only its second year in Nashville, the SPBGMA event attracted guests as well-known as Ricky Skaggs, Jimmy Martin, and The Whites. "People are getting to know us as a result of holding the awards in Nashville," reported Stearman.

"All these years we're working towards this sort of convention in Nashville. We're going to continue the way we've been going — trying to maintain the traditional instruments and arrangements. There's a growing movement for both traditional and progressive acoustic music. We can work in harmony as long as we respect each other."

Those wishing to harmonize with SPBGMA can get more information from Chuck Stearman at Box 271, Kirksville, MO 63501.

The SPBGMA festivities coincided with the Nashville Bluegrass Music Association's (NBMA) regular mini-festival at the Station Inn. The 12-year-old Nashville club has earned a reputation as one of the places to see bluegrass, attracting luminary fans ranging from Porter Wagoner to Robert Duvall. The mini-festivals, usually held on the last Saturday of the month, provide a focal point for the Nashville bluegrass community.

"The mini-festivals are everybody in town just coming down and picking once a month to raise funds for the association," said Country Gazette mandolinist Roland White. White, who has played with Lester Flatt, Bill Mon-

roe, and the legendary Kentucky Colonels, has actively supported NBMA since its inception on New Year's Eve of 1982.

NBMA publishes a newsletter and has sponsored concerts and workshops in Music City. "You have to organize to build a reputation for the music," according to White. "Now we have an audience for bluegrass in Nashville. There are million of people who would be bluegrass fans if they only knew about it."

Fans at the Station Inn for the January mini-festival had a treat when Rose Maddox joined White and the New Kentucky Colonels on stage for seven vigorous bluegrass classics. The Maddox Brothers and Rose enjoyed considerable chart success as perhaps the most popular C&W band on the West Coast just after World War II.

(NBMA, P.O. Box 24144, Nashville, TN 37202).

Late spring should bring the release of a Sugar Hill album by Jonathan Edwards and the Seldom Scene. Edwards handles most of the lead vocals, but tenor John Duffey, mandolinist for the Scene, takes over on a couple of cuts, including a reworking of "Sunshine." The tune was a pop smash for Edwards during the early 1970s.

"It sounds good," said Duffey. "We've been

able to work out the harmonies real well." The project resulted from Edwards' regular attendance at the Scene's Thursday night gigs at the Alexandria, Va., Birchmere Club.

Chicago's Buck Stove and Range Co. have completed their third album-length recording, featuring their unique country/new grass sound. Denise Bannister handles vocals on "Object Of My Affection," also waxed by Delbert McClinton, and Patsy Cline's "Walking After Midnight." The band is touring in Europe this spring.

"Twin Sisters," a mountain tune done up in fine style by Doc & Merle Watson on their *Down South* album (Sugar Hill SH3742), received a Grammy nomination for Country Instrumental. Joining the Watsons on the nominated track are Buddy Davis on bass and New Grass Revival's Sam Bush on fiddle. Merle, by the way, picked banjo rather than guitar.

Art Menius is a consultant to *The Linear Group*, which produces *Fire On The Mountain* for *The Nashville Network* and the syndicated *Liberty Flyer* radio series. A former staff historian for the North Carolina Dept. of Cultural Resources, he also is a contributing editor and featured columnist for *Carolina Bluegrass Review*. He has written articles for *Bluegrass Unlimited*, *Spectator Magazine*, and *Southern Exposure*.



Buck's Stove and Range Co.