

Ralph Stanley keeping the

Since the death of Carter Stanley in 1966, Ralph Stanley has kept the Stanley Brothers tradition alive with the consistent help of fiddler Curley Ray Cline and bassist Jack Cooke. Clinch Mountain Boys who have come and gone during the past two decades have included Ricky Skaggs, Keith Whitley, Roy Lee Centers and Ron Thomason.

Stanley's *I Can Tell You The Time*, the most recent of a long series of recordings for Rebel Records, displays the fine vocals of today's Clinch Mountain Boys. Guitarists Charlie Sizemore and Junior Blankenship team up with Brother Ralph's unmistakable mountain tenor to provide most of the vocal highlights on a first-rate set of Stanley gospel favorites, including "Daniel Prayed" and "He Will Set Your Woods on Fire."

Also new from Rebel, the Roanoke, Va., label which has waxed some classic bluegrass recordings over the last 20 some odd years, are a sparkling gospel set from the Forbes Family, *I'm Just A Pilgrim*, and *Close To Home*, an inconsistent, but at times wonderfully soulful, album from Dave Evans and River Bend.

Tireless Jane Lancaster (rumor has it she received a special award from the Columbian Coffee Growers Association) will host her second annual acoustical music convention in Nacogdoches, Texas, on February 7-8. Presentations will include workshops on most aspects of the music business and instrumental playing and repairs, music business displays, and concerts by The Country Gazette, the all-star Convention Bluegrass Band (with Tim O'Brien, Mark O'Connor and Alan Munde) and several others.

The major labels' New Year's resolution seems to be to jump on the so-called new age acoustical music developed by independent recording companies, especially Windham Hill.

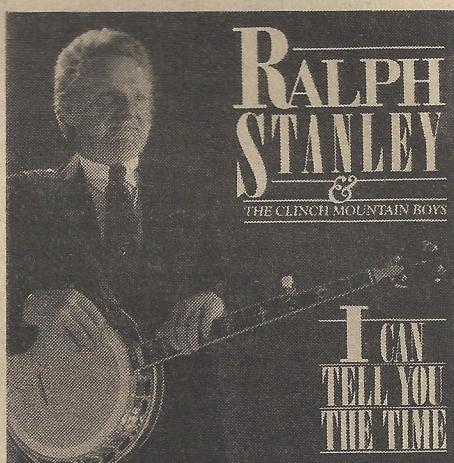
Fiddler and guitarist extraordinaire Mark O'Connor has inked a three-album deal with Warners. The first record, *Pleasure Of . . .*, should be in the racks by now. Solo instrumental albums by Nashville dobroist Jerry Douglas and bassman Edgar Meyer will be part of a six-album set of an acoustical Master Series due for release early this year on MCA.

Frank Wakefield, the legendary mandolinist whose experiments with bluegrass picking

Another Country



Art
Menius



during the 1950s foreshadowed the new acoustic music, now works with the red hot musicians known as Summit. Based in up-state New York, Summit features Chris Lee on banjo, Craig Vance on guitar and Steve Joseph on bass. They look forward to a new album in '86.

Here are those guys again! *The Bluegrass Album Volume Four* on Rounder from the all-star aggregation of Tony Rice, Doyle Lawson, Todd Phillips, J.D. Crowe and Jerry Douglas may be the strongest set so far in the series. Although the crew proves that Jim Croce's "Age" makes a great bluegrass song, they otherwise again turn 1980's skills to first generation bluegrass. Classic tracks include "Head Over Heels," "The Old Home Town" and "Cheyenne."

A new album from the Johnson Mountain Boys has also been long awaited on Rounder. *We'll Still Sing On*, which appeared in late November, finds the new traditionalists showing their trio and quartet vocal chops on a dozen bluegrass gospel tunes. The song selection is top-notch, unearthing a bunch of tunes which have been unjustly ignored. Dudley Connell's tenor lead reaches new heights, reminding me of Bill Monroe in the 1930s with his earthly range.

Although Norman Blake's *Lighthouse On The Shore* appeared only last October, further Rounder albums from the talented threesome who form the Rising Fawn String Ensemble should be out soon. Look for a second fiddle album by James Bryan and a record of original compositions from Nancy Blake.

Rutabaga Records, the contemporary bluegrass arm of Old Hat, has

Another issue

1985 turned out to be a fine year for bluegrass reissues. The Rebel Records of Canada album *Air Mail Special* makes available Jim and Jesse's tremendous Capitol sides recorded between 1952 and 1955.

Early Dot Recordings: Volume One from County Records collects a dozen gems from 1951 to 1957, the bluegrass period of Mac Wiseman's lengthy career.

The tradition alive and well

leased four albums so far. Two singles recently appeared. "Don't Let Me Cross Over" is a first-rate country duet by Emma Smith and Dave Evans with acoustic backup begging for airplay. "Clockin' My Card"/"Here Today And Gone Tomorrow" is hard hitting, but somewhat rough edged, bluegrass from veteran sideman Dana Cupp and the Detroit Bluegrass Band.

Phil & Gaye Johnson have a new album, their second, on the CRC/Aster label. Entitled *Mountain Flower*, it showcases their formidable songwriting and vocal skills in live performances taken from *The Liberty Flyer*, the recently discontinued syndicated radio program which the Johnsons hosted during 1985.

Rebel Records has purchased masters recorded during the late 1970s for the defunct Leather and Dominion labels by Jim Eanes, the warm voiced Decca star of the early 1950s. Eanes said to look for a release this month. He's still writing songs and plans a new recording session at Salem, Va.'s JRM Studios.

In addition to *Reel And Rock*, his brand new musical album on Flying Fish, *Fire On The Mountain* host David Holt has released a second record of his story telling entitled *Tailybone & Other Strange Stories* on his own High Windy label.

Janette Carter, who has maintained the traditions of country music's most famous family at the Carter Family Fold near Hyttons, Va., became the first folk artist to receive the Virginia Governor's Award for the Arts last year.

Lots of news from Carter's prize pupil John McCutcheon this month. His *Howjadoo* won NAIRD's Children's Album of the Year for 1985. *Signs Of The Time*, an exciting collaboration with Si Kahn, appeared last month on Rounder. Meanwhile, McCutcheon returned to the studio to cut a multiple hammer dulcimer album for spring release.

Trapezoid, Metamora, Walt Michael, Bill Spence and Paul Van Arsdale participated in the session.

The bluegrass community is still reeling from the tragic, apparently vengeful destruction of the mandolin, Bill Monroe's 1923 Gibson Lloyd Loar which he has played since 1941. An intruder at Monroe's farm used a fire poker given the Father of Bluegrass Music by former sidemen to destroy the Loar, another classic mandolin and a portrait of the Opry star.

Send me some happier news for this column to Rt. 1, Box 710, Pittsboro, NC 27312.

Art Menius is a consultant to The Linear Group and a former staff historian for the North Carolina Dept. of Cultural Resources. He is a contributing editor and columnist for Carolina Bluegrass Review.

Items of interest

■ Chris Hillman recently fractured his pelvis in a bicycle accident. He should be alive and pickin' soon.

■ Music theatre veterans The Red Clay Ramblers are back on Broadway providing the tunes for Sam Shepard's *A Lie Of The Mind* at the Promenade Theater.

■ Stoney Lonesome of *Prairie Home Companion* fame will record their second long player this month before departing on a March/April tour of Japan.

■ North Carolinian Tim Wilson, who has worked with Marc Pruett, Sonny James, and the Bluegrass Alliance, recently joined Chicago's Special Consensus on guitar and vocals.

■ Electric bassist Tim Atkins and vocalist Dara White have joined former Blue Grass Boy Bobby Atkins and The Countrymen.

