

McCoury and band reach high bluegrass plateau

For more than two decades Del McCoury has gained rave notices as perhaps the best high lead vocalist in bluegrass. In the past couple of years McCoury has quietly assembled the tightest traditional bands in the business.

The current version of his Dixie Pals, with son Ronnie McCoury on mandolin, Jon Glik fiddling, Paul Silvius picking banjo, and the exceptional Mike Garriss on bass, has reached one of those rare moments in a band's development. They've been working together long enough that everything's right on the money, yet the freshness and excitement of working with one another is still intact.

Del McCoury and the Dixie Pals are at that moment where they can do no wrong, and anyone who misses a chance to hear them is headed down the highway of regrets.

1984's *Take Me To The Mountains* demonstrated that McCoury had reached his peak. His latest Rebel album, *Sawmill*, suggests he intends to stay there for the foreseeable future.

With McCoury and Garriss penning tunes and Del's uncanny ability to select material, the Dixie Pals prove there's plenty of fresh material for traditional outfits. Highlights include Garriss' "Loneliness And Desperation" and a bluegrass updating of the country classic, "Pick Me Up On Your Way Down."

Tony Rice LP upcoming

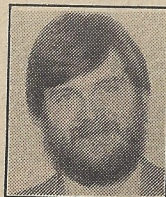
Guitar great Tony Rice will have a new album out this winter on Rounder. Jerry Douglas, Vassar Clements, Bobby Hicks, Sam Bush and several others helped Rice with the recording. Sources close to both Rice and Norman Blake claim that the flatpickers extraordinaire are planning to record together.

Progressive label founded

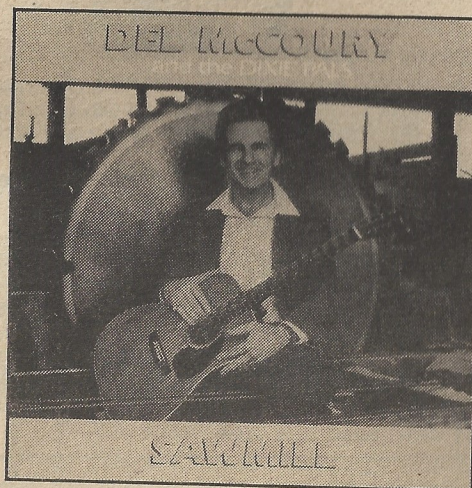
Pat Martin, director of June Appal Records since 1979, resigned her post to found Turquoise Records, also based in Whitesburg, Ky. Martin said the label will focus on "progressive folk and bluegrass music."

The initial Turquoise release, *Traditional Music Of The Future* by No Strings Attached, seems to be aimed at the New Age or Windham Hill market, however. Light years from bluegrass, *No Strings Attached* mixes jazz, Celtic, and Appalachian music into an en-

Another Country



Art Menius



chanting, and surprisingly dynamic, sound.

The band hails from Roanoke, Va., the flood-stricken home of the Iroquois Club. The nightspot jumped into the bluegrass field with both feet last fall, presenting shows by Bill Monroe, Frank Wakefield, J.D. Crowe, The Lonesome River Band, The Lost & Found, Ralph Stanley, Del McCoury and Larry Sparks.

Sparks' latest Rebel album, *Lonesome Guitar*, finds him temporarily forsaking his soulful singing to showcase his equally expressive, and often overlooked, guitar picking. Stuart Duncan and Josh Graves lend a hand on this fine instrumental set. The fast numbers are nothing special, but on the slow and medium tempo tunes Sparks tastefully wrenches every bit of emotion from his Martin.

Bluegrass entertainment

An all-star bluegrass lineup appeared in Dayton, Ohio, November 23 for the second annual "Don Reno Appreciation Day Concert." According to Pat Allen of the sponsoring OKI Bluegrass Association, the money raised by the benefit event will establish a musicians' trust fund named in honor of the late banjo genius.

Vice President George Bush was among the guests at the Swedish embassy in Washington, D.C., when the Navy's bluegrass and country outfit, Country Current, entertained at a state dinner for Sweden's Prince Bertil and Princess Lilian, according to the *Washington Post*. Bill Emerson, banjo picker for the Country Gentlemen during the late 1950s and early 1970s, leads the Current.

College program flourishes

In ten years, Texas' South Plains College has witnessed phenomenal growth in its unique country and bluegrass music program. They've already added a sound reinforcement curriculum to keep their 16-track studio busy, and a \$500,000 building expansion in 1986 will give them a TV studio for video production.

The Levelland community showed their support with an overflow crowd for the concert segment of SPC's Bluegrass Fair on November 2. Country Gazette's Alan Munde and Slim Richey of Ridge Runner Records performed and presented workshops as featured guests.

Gazette cuts album

Top flight engineer Rich Adler sat at the controls at Nashville's Studio 19 in October when the long-lived Country Gazette cut their first release in some three years, *Bluegrass Tonight*. Featuring several new tunes, the album should appear this spring on Flying Fish.

Holt to tour Africa

David Holt, host of *Fire On The Mountain* on The Nashville Network, will make a performing tour through Africa during January. He's already purchased a new open backed banjo for the trip.

Holt is now on Flying Fish Records with his long awaited *Reel And Rock* album due out anytime.

String music exploration

Like Flying Fish labelmates the Red Clay

Ramblers, the Critton Hollow String Band proves that string band music can be a method for exploring all sorts of music. Their latest album, *By And By*, includes old-time, Celtic and Russian material as well as a stunning version of the 1950s pop gospel hit, "This Old House."

Back to the basics

Although 50 years have gone by since the WBT Briarhoppers first stepped up to the radio microphone, they still appreciate broadcasting with an old-time feel. Thus their recreation of the old *Briarhopper Show* with announcer Charles Crutchfield at the Charlotte Country Music Story and their recent appearance on *A Prairie Home Companion* proved to be highlights of a busy 1985 schedule, according to bassman Don White, a one-time *National Barn Dance* regular.

Convention time

SPBGMA's National Convention, band contest and awards show are slated for January 17-19 at the Opryland Hotel. Last year's meeting drew more than 3,000 fans.

IBMA elects acting board

Ricky Skaggs, John Hartford, Doug Dillard, Ronnie Reno, Mel Beshar, Doyle Lawson, Donny Osborne and Mac Wiseman joined more than 100 folks at the first public meeting of the International Bluegrass Music Association (IBMA), the new bluegrass industry trade organization, on October 16 at Nashville's Blair School of Music. The temporary board of directors elected Pete Kuykendall chairman; named South Plains College their Center for Bluegrass Studies and Research; and tabbed your faithful correspondent acting executive director.

Send it here

Your correspondence for this column and questions about IBMA should be directed to Art Menius at Rt. 1, Box 710, Pittsboro, NC 27312.

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