



Cloud Valley



The Nashville Bluegrass Band

Groups gearing up for festivals

Springtime always brings out a host of new bluegrass and acoustic country releases as artists gear up for a summer of outdoor festival appearances. The Nashville Bluegrass Band's first album, *My Native Home*, should be out this month on Rounder Records.

Although together as a group only since last July, The Nashville Bluegrass Band consists of veteran professionals. Pat Enright plays guitar and sings lead. Alan O'Bryant picks banjo, while Mike Compton handles the mandolin chores. Mark Hembree, Bill Monroe's bassist for five years, keeps a faultless beat on the stand-up bass.

Banjo wizard Bela Fleck produced *My Native Home* at the Nashville Sound Connection with Bill Vornick behind the controls. Blaine Sprouse of the Osborne Brothers band added some tasty fiddle on four tracks.

"It's pretty much straightforward with our own special twang," Hembree said after a recent Station Inn appearance in Nashville. "Traditional, yet original."

Also due out this month on Atteriem Records is the latest long player from the Grand Ole Opry's Jim and Jesse, *When You're Smiling*. Columbia artist Carl Jackson produced the platter at Hendersonville, Tenn.'s Studio By The Pond.

The album marks the recorded return of Alan Shelton, Jim and Jesse's banjo man when they were Epic Record stars during the early

Another Country



Art
Menius

1960s. Shelton picks banjo on half the cuts from *When You're Smiling* and his unusual five-string dobro on the rest. The release coincides with Jim and Jesse's May/June tour of Africa.

The most talked-about acoustic country/bluegrass release of the spring has to be Dan Fogelberg's long-awaited album, *High Country Snows*. Recorded more than a year ago, the record marks a major change of direction for one of the 1970s hottest pop stylists. Even then, however, his music showed definite country influence.

Fogelberg launched a major tour in support of the album in April. His crackerjack band included Herb Peterson, Al Perkins, David Grisman, Jerry Douglas of The Whites, Russ Kunkel, and Chris Hillman.

Speaking of Hillman, the Flying Burrito Brothers cofounder toured the East Coast in

March promoting his latest Sugar Hill release, *Desert Rose*. The junket included an interview with National Public Radio's *All Things Considered*. The title cut of The Oak Ridge Boys' latest album, *Steppin' On Out*, is a Hillman composition.

The Linear Group completed tapings in March for their national syndicated radio series *The Liberty Flyer* and in April for *Fire On The Mountain* on The Nashville Network. The Osborne Brothers, the Bluegrass Cardinals, and Phil & Gaye Johnson recorded both programs. The Johnson Mountain Boys, Riders in the Sky and Jim and Jesse performed for the radio show, while Ralph Stanley and The John Herald Band were among those facing the television cameras.

Cloud Valley, the bluegrass ensemble from Charlottesville, Va., finish up four months as four-fifths of the touring company for the late Harry Chapin's musical, *Cotton Patch Revue*, at the end of May.

"It was great exposure for us playing and acting before audiences of 500 to 1,000 people every night," said Cloud Valley banjoist Bill Evans.

On the foreign scene, superhot guitarist Dan Crary tours Holland, Switzerland, Sweden and Germany this month, while Sugar Hill labelmate Peter Rowan has just returned from England.

Continued on page 16

Groups gear up for festivals

Continued from page 14

Flying Fish's Tony Trischka and Skyline made their second visit to Japan in April, playing concert halls in Tokyo, Osaka, and Kyoto. The innovative band is fueled by the vocal dynamics of Dede Wyland and Danny Weiss.

Peter, Paul and Mary have signed a distribution deal with Rounder Records for a live album that they have been marketing themselves.

Other artists have experienced success through selling their records by mail order. John Prine's agent has reportedly sold 16,000 albums from his office, while folky Tom Rush has filled over 20,000 orders for the souvenir recording of a folk superstars concert which he organized in Boston last year.

Takoma Park, Maryland's banjo picking cowgirl, Cathy Fink, won the American Library Association's Notable Record Award for her Rounder children's album, *Grandma Slid Down The Mountain*.

In a sad note, North Carolina fiddler Tommy Jarrell passed away at age 83. Tommy's later years had been among his happiest following his discovery as perhaps the premier active old-time fiddler of the 1970s. No one in the genre matched his driving dance rhythm, but his greatest contribution came through tireless instruction and encouragement of young musicians. Tommy's doors never closed on those who loved his music.

Until next month, I'll see you at the festivals.

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.