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Warren Fahey presents
Down The
Overlander's Trail
THE EARLY DAYS
OF COUNTRY
MUSIC
IN AUSTRALIA
Tex Morton * Reg Lindsay * June Holms
Johnny Ashcroft * Buddy Williams
Bob Dyer * Art Leonard and many more
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Down The Overlander's Trail

THE EARLY DAYS OF COUNTRY MUSIC IN AUSTRALIA

There was a time when country music ruled the Australian capital city radio airwaves. This was the 1940s and early 1950s when we didn't feel as 'musically pigeon-holed' as today. There was also a lot of 'light classical' music available but it was 'country and western', for that's what it was called, that you heard when you tuned into the more popular stations. In some ways it was a strange music and, more often than not, performed live in the studio – and sounded like it! A typical radio station 'band' would be comprised of piano accordion, harmonica, acoustic guitar and drums. There was also a sound effects person ready to provide turning wagon wheels, clip clop hooves and even the occasional cracking stockwhip. The songs were introduced in a congenial style reminiscent of homespun yarners fresh from the high hills of Montana. Much of the music was used for station breaks, interludes and to back spoken commercials. It had a 'western' sound familiar to anyone who had seen a Hollywood western film – for this is where 'country and western' got its name. Nowadays the music is universally known as 'Country' music and more likely to sing about trucks, city life and emotional heartbreak like D I V O R C E and vagabond husbands.

Country and Western accompanied quiz shows like Bob Dyer's 'Cop the Lot', and for serials featuring heroes like Hopalong Cassidy, and then there were the crazy comedies like Willie Fennel's 'Life With Dexter' and the famous 'Bunkhouse Show'. Radio was far more music-based in those days and the talking heads, like Eric Baume, were only heard at special times. Now the reverse is true and music is seen as incidental to everything else. Reg Lindsay once described the early days of Australian country music radio like this: "Radio stations didn't have to have a committee to listen to the record, or a program manager to see if it fitted their format."

The pioneer recording industry played an important role in popularising early country music and it also worked closely with radio performers. Local recordings were made of American C&W and novelty hits because there were government restrictions as to importing gramophone recordings and, of course,

transportation by sea freight meant unbelievably long delays in getting the songs into the local market. These local recordings were known as 'cover' versions and our earliest country pioneers were actually artists who recorded popular covers for the local radio and gramophone industries.

Radio talent shows, forerunners to today's shows like *Australia's Got Talent* attracted country artists including some who actually wrote their own material. Many of these artists, including the great Tex Morton, were part country artist and part vaudeville. Some, like Bob Dyer, were complete showmen from the vaudeville circuit.

There is no doubt that Australians carried an innocent cultural cringe throughout much of the nineteenth century. We had been born primarily of an Anglo Celtic background where we had been led to believe we were 'colonials' and certainly not British like the British! We were gawky hayseeds from Down Under. Maybe this had something to do with our convict birth, maybe something to do with the large Irish population and maybe it was simply that we were still struggling to find our identity. In many ways we found that identity on the frontlines of WW1 and WW2 but it was also evident on the 1850s goldfields where men of every background came together to seek their fortune in a hostile land where we needed to be fair dinkum, true blue and Aussies. It was also where our ethos of mateship was born – you needed a mate to work the mine, guard the tent etc. Our national poets like Henry Lawson and Banjo Paterson recognised these traits and became crucial in making us understand that we had a special affinity with the bush and although we weren't British we were just as good, possibly better.

Early bush poets and songwriters, mostly anonymous, also gave us a voice. It was a voice that was common to shearers, drovers, bullockies, timber cutters, farming families and anyone else who toiled this great brown land. The voice remained when we experienced the reality of a massive population shift that coincided with the decade surrounding Federation in 1901, when the bulk of our population

found itself living on the coasts and in cities, rather than the bush. We were bushies in the cities and we knew where we had come from and the debt we owed to our pioneers.

The early days of Australian country and western found us confused. Radio had replaced the campfire and we were hearing a lot of American music. Although we had pioneered feature films 'Ma and Pa Kettle', and an endless supply of 'singing cowboys' significantly outnumbered our 'Dad and Dave's'. Songs about tumbling tumbleweeds, Red River Valleys and Blue Kentucky Mountains had started to replace our stories of legendary shearers, overlanders and the outback. We called each other 'partner' and greeted each other with 'Howdy-do'. We were becoming Americanised and the bells were already ringing in a new world. The songs our country pioneers sang were mostly American because that is the way the musical world was going.

We cannot ignore the influence and the popularity of the guitar and harmonica in our story. Pick up any early songster, especially the Boomerang Songster, and you will find 'teach yourself' advertisements in every edition. The harmonica was so popular it was often referred to as 'the band in a waistcoat pocket'. You will also find the songs that our singers sang and recorded including some that were massive gramophone and radio hits. There were hobo songs, love duets, novelty songs, cowboy ballads and, of course, the inevitable cowboy yodels. The music also illustrates musical fashion and fads. Songs about horses, dogs, lovesick blues, and country music with a Hawaiian flavour all saw popularity. Square dance was also popular in the 40s and 50s and that popularised Western Swing. Bluegrass, that American music often known as the 'high lonesome sound', and notable because of many of its key players, like Flatt and Scruggs and Bill Monroe, featured amazing instrumental dexterity. Bluegrass was admired but had little influence in Australia until Slim Dusty highlighted it by performing with the Hamilton County Bluegrass Band who actually hailed from New Zealand.

Thankfully many Australian pioneer country and western artists started to pen their own songs and, in several instances, make changes to the words of songs so those rolling plains became dusty plains and the tumbling tumbleweeds got replaced with saltbush. The fact that many of these early artists travelled the land performing tent shows must have helped them steer a more Australian cultural course.

The main thing about the artists represented in this collection is that they are all storytellers and represent a time in our music history when stories were very important. Radio served a similar role and it's often been said that radio is superior to television because the pictures are better in your imagination. Ballad writers and singers know this and in many ways the early country writers and singers were a continuation of the old bush tradition of storytelling and campfire entertainment.

I was privileged enough to know Tex Morton quite well. When I set up my independent Larrikin record label, above the Folkways record store in Paddington, Tex used to visit me every couple of weeks. He had a contract to do the voice-over for advertising commercials for David's Holdings, a grocery supply chain. The somewhat irritating commercials hung on the line "Where'dya Get It?" which Tex delivered in one of his high-pitched character voices. Tex had hundreds of character voices and thousands of stories, I still kick myself that I never recorded our conversations where he would relate stories of travelling the bush, presenting tent shows, recording and, of course, early radio. I loved his monologues and he was a master at telling them in his droll, matter-of-fact style. I was also impressed he could roll a ready-rub cigarette with one hand. We also talked about my field of folk music. Tex always believed folk music and early country music were kissing cousins.

I also knew Reg Lindsay, Smoky Dawson, Chad Morgan, Slim Dusty, Gordon Parsons, Johnny Ashcroft and Stan Coster well enough to know they all possessed a passion for Australian stories and, of course, Australian country music. I recorded several albums with Reg Lindsay and two with the wonderful Chad Morgan and distributed Stan Coster's albums on Ross Murphy's Opal label.

There are a few distinct characteristics that identify our pioneer artists. Their guitar style was simplistic yet very effective – Gene Autry, Hank Snow, Tex Ritter, Roy Rogers, Jimmie Rodgers, Hank Williams, Vernon Dalhart and the Carter Family, many of whom had been themselves influenced by either American old-timey, bluegrass or the blues, influenced us. Yodelling was another feature Australian artists embraced and Shirley Thoms, Reg Lindsay, Tex Morton and Slim Dusty were all wonderful yodellers. Many of our artists were influenced by the British singer Harry Torrani and the American Jimmie Rodgers. Our pioneers also dressed 'cowboy' style, no doubt influenced by what they saw in Hollywood films, although most morphed into a much more acceptable bush attire, as they grew older (and wiser).

Country music is not folk music, although they do share some of the same characteristics, and although we have now dropped the 'western' moniker, we can now claim a new breed of modern country writers and singers who *continue to tell our stories*. They should never forget their debt to our musical pioneers. Call me old fashioned (and no doubt you will) but I still prefer these wonky old recordings to any of the new breed. This isn't to say our contemporary singers aren't terrific performers – many of them are – but, for me, there's something special about these old 'scratchies' and, dare I say it, some of the recent Australian country albums are too slick for their own good and tend to sound too commercial, too influenced by the record and radio industries.

There have been several reissued collections, and there will, no doubt, be several more. Some pioneer artists, and some headed for that status, have been omitted for no other reason than I wanted this collection to tell its own story. In saying that I doff my hat to the likes of Brian Young, Rick and Thel Carey, Dougie Young, Ron Peters, Hawking Brothers, Kevin Sheog, Jimmy Little, Dusty Rankin, Stan Coster, The Singing kettles, Gil Harris, The Sundowners, Lily Connors, The BBQ Girls, and Shorty Ranger, to name a handful. Rather than run the program in strict historical order of first recorded etc I have gone for *evoking the spirit of the music* as it followed its own overlander trail. In assembling this particular collection my intention was simply to celebrate our country storytelling pioneers and to ensure they are still available and still singing.

Warren Fahey AM
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This eye-opening article, published in The Sunday Herald (Sydney) 3 December 1950 explains how the music swept the country. By the way, Mr. Jones certainly got a few facts wrong – Tex Morton was a Kiwi.

Hill-billy Music Sweeps Through Australia

By BERTRAM JONES

HILLBILLY music – the haunting, sentimental songs of the prairies and timberlands – is sweeping Australia in a burst of popularity unequalled in the memory of the big publishing firms. Hillbilly records are snapped up as soon as they come on the market. Hillbilly song albums vanish from music shop counters in hours. Hillbilly sessions take peak hour places in the programmes of dozens of radio stations. It is a phenomenon that the music moguls find hard to explain. But, like the cinema, songs are getting back to the Wild West and the blue ranges, to a simple level that finds enjoyment on lonesome trails under silver moons, or in the arms of a sweet girl who waits faithfully for her man to ride out of the sunset on his patient pinto pal. The words are saccharine sweet. The melody is unambitious but usually catchy. It is enlivened with falsetto yodels. And the theme, more often than not, points a moral that sticks out a mile.

As popular entertainment in Australia, hillbillies are 20 years old at least. And their routine has not changed much.

No one can say with certainty when the popularity charts began their upward sweep. And there is equal doubt about the reason. The only man who could even suggest a cause was the song publisher who said yesterday: "People have had enough of space-ships and rocket-guns and brittle modern stuff. They find a sort of restfulness in the unashamed sentiment of hillbillies."

BUT, no matter what started the vogue, the fact is that in any average month in Sydney now music shops sell about 200 guitars to people who have yielded to the hillbilly influence and who want to strum and yodel in the cowboy style.

They pay, as a rule, anything from £5 to £12 each. A big publishing firm has added a special hillbilly guitar course to its music college curriculum, promising to teach you in ten fortnightly lessons – price £2 – how to accompany your own songs, even though you have no previous musical knowledge.

ALTHOUGH the hillbilly is American in origin, Australian opportunists remoulded it. Under their influence the hillbilly has gone bush. The Texan prairies have given way to the outback plains. The sage has become saltbush and the cowpuncher a boundary rider. But the earthiness and the simplicity remain.

A music-store man from Lismore said the other day that no matter how many hillbilly records the makers send him he can sell them all – and ask for more.

Boys write to their radio stations clamouring for autographed pictures of their hillbilly idol just like other boys appeal to Hollywood for photographs of their favourite western screen stars.

And back the photographs come – usually of a curly-haired young man with a shy grin, a 10-gallon hat, an embroidered shirt and a pair of highly decorative riding boots. The western rig, although the repertoire may be Australian.

TAKE Kid Mahoney, from Queensland, who bills himself on the music halls and in the radio programmes as 'The Yodelling Cowboy'. Kid paid £4 for his rodeo top black boots, £7 for his leather chaps (a flapping-legged garment like a pair of very tough trousers, usually topped by a gun belt and two Colts), and 45/ for his hat. His mother makes his cowboy shirts – usually black and white ones – so he gets those cheap. And his fan mail in one year reached 17,000 letters, he says.

Like Australian Tex Morton, Kid Mahoney really has roughed it in the wide-open spaces. He has been a station hand and a Queensland rodeo rider, and soldier in Pacific Island jungles. Tex Morton, the first indigenous Australian hillbilly singer, once turned down a radio offer of £ 100 a week.

BUT before you go rushing to buy that guitar and strain your vocal chords trying to yodel, pause a moment. Every week at least two aspiring hillbilly singers present themselves at a recording company's studios in Sydney, full of ideas and hope – hope to get into the big money. Hardly any succeed in passing an audition. And when they do, their immediate reward may be no greater than Kid Mahoney's one shilling and halfpenny on every record. You have to sell an awful lot to pay for a guitar.

CD ONE

ART LEONARD Can I Sleep In Your Barn Tonight, Mister?

Leonard Maurice (1900-1952) recorded several country covers for radio between 1926-1933. In the 1930s he worked in radio with 2GR and 2UW. He was the main recording artist for the Columbia Graphophone Company with 78s released on Columbia and Regal Zonophone. In his recordings it is easy to see he came from a music theatre background where he worked for the Tivoli and Fullers vaudeville circuits. Recorded 1932.

THE HILLBILLY SINGERS When I Get To The End of the Way

Another radio act with a more classical approach to country were the Hillbilly singers. This duet, recorded in 1933, is reminiscent of American country gospel with a bass and tenor vocal arrangement for fiddle, piano and guitar.

THE SINGING STOCKMEN Hillbilly Valley

The Singing Stockmen were another radio studio act. Rich is harmonies and American popular music styles they had a brief influence.

ART LEONARD The Face on the Barroom Floor

So-called tearjerker songs were extremely popular in Australia. Maybe these sentimental songs about tragedy suited our outback loneliness, where separation from home and loved ones was such a reality. Tearjerkers about families ruined by wicked alcohol were particularly popular.

ART LEONARD AND FREDDIE WITT They Cut Down the Old Pine Tree

Another tearjerker but this features Len Maurice in duet with the American Freddie Witt who came to Australia in 1919 for work on the vaudeville circuit (returning to America the same year) and returned in 1924 later joining Sydney radio station 2KY where he eventually became station program manager. He recorded as a member of The Big Four vocal quartet.

LEN MAURICE The Big Rock Candy Mountain

This song by 'wobbly' (International Workers of the World) songwriter Harry McClintock was a massive worldwide hit as it told the story of hobo heaven where rivers ran free booze and lamb chops hung from trees. The song finds Maurice with a more country sounding style that gives the song a definite lift.

P. C. SPOUSE Cuckoo Waltz

The harmonica, or mouth organ, was synonymous with early Australia and drovers tell of softly playing it during their long night shifts overseeing their herd. The music reassured the cattle and prevented any sudden panic and subsequent stampede. Shearers played the instrument, as they lay exhausted in their bunks after a day of backbreaking shearing. The instrument also found its way to the stage and radio and harmonica competitions were staged across Australia for many years. Percival Spouse (1885-1977) was our most-awarded player.

TEX MORTON AND HARRY THOMPSON South American Joe

Tex Morton regularly featured Australian champion harmonica player Harry Thompson in his tent and radio shows. Thompson, a noted teacher of the instrument, also recorded many tunes. Here he plays a Latin influenced western tune for Tex Morton's radio show.

TEX MORTON & SISTER DORRIE Hand Me Down My Walking Cane

This song comes from the so-called 'war years' (during WW2) when Morton (1916-1983) refused to record any songs with Columbia because of a disagreement with one of its key managers, Arch Kerr. Luckily some radio wire recordings show us what the master was up to. Here he sings one of his most popular songs with his long-time female singer, Dorothy Ricketts. Dorothy had been a member of The Rough Riders vocal group. Thins was recorded in 1948.

TEX MORTON Mandrake

Songs about horses and dogs were always popular and audiences used to shout out particular songs names "Sing us Old Shep" or "What about Mandrake?" Morton was always a crowd pleaser and could turn any request into a monologue or completely different songs.

TEX MORTON Along the Stock Route

Here is one of Tex's most popular monologues. Self-penned as far as we know and it is stamped with his own brand of outback delivery. I can see him standing there, audience hanging on every word, whilst Tex casually rolled a cigarette with one hand, occasionally looking up as to remind the audience he was the king of country music.

SMILIN' BILLY BLINKHORN Poor Ned Kelly

In 1939 a young Canadian singer known as Smilin' Billy Blinkhorn (1914-1977) came to Australia to try his luck as a country performing artist. He was offered an opportunity to record for Regal Zonophone in that same year and wanted to record some favourites plus a song, which would tell about an aspect of Australia's history. He chose the story of bushranger Ned Kelly and set the highwayman in a contemporary setting. It was an inspired move.

JENNY HOWARD Oh Johnny, Oh Johnny Oh

Set dancing, especially versions of the old-fashioned barn dance and Lancers had a long history in 19th century Australia and started to disappear in the early 20th century. In the late 1940s and throughout the 50s square dancing became popular. Flashily dressed couples (in American cowhand costume) would do-se-do to the singing instructions of a dance caller. There were many 78r pm recordings available in Australia. My parents were members of a square dance club and this song, Oh Johnny Oh Johnny Oh was one of my favourites. Jenny Howard came from the Tivoli circuit regularly playing the pantomime 'boy'. The song was recorded late 1940s.

BOB DYER I Never See Maggie Alone

Bob Dyer (1909-1984) was a Tivoli vaudeville performer from Nashville. He always played up his 'hillbilly' roots. He was a decent ukulele player and a terrific novelty singer, regularly injecting comments into his songs. His famous songs were all hillbilly favourites and he did two recording sessions in 1939 at the BBC studios in London. Dyer eventually became one of Australia's most popular and successful artists, especially through his comedy radio and television quiz shows.

SHIRLEY THOMS The Cowgirl Yodel

Shirley Thoms (1925 - 1999) has the distinction of being Australia's first female solo recording artists. Sister Dorrie recorded before her but it was alongside Tex Morton in duet. Thoms was also the first Queenslander to be recorded. Known as 'Australia's Yodelling Sweetheart', the two things that make Thoms stand out is the fact she wrote the majority of her songs, even if they still sang of cowgirls, prairies and Texas Sally; the other is her remarkable yodelling ability.

SHIRLEY THOMS Night Time On The Prairie

Shirley is in fine voice as she sings about the legendary prairies. Prairies are technically grasslands, savannahs and scrubland so one can assume the defiant Thoms was actually thinking of the word in the context to Australian scrublands. I certainly like to think she was.

JUNE HOLMS Happy Yodelling Cowgirl

June Holms was another Regal Zonophone recording artist although she only made half a dozen recordings including this one 'Happy Yodelling Cowgirl recorded in 1942 at Homebush, Sydney.

GORDON PARSONS The Australian Bushman

Gordon Parsons (1926-1990) was born a city slicker in Paddington, Sydney, but there is no denying he had a great affinity for the Australian bush. His first recordings were made at the age of 18 in 1946 after he had won the Terry Dear Talent Show contest. He continued to write and record. His most famous composition is 'The Pub With No Beer'.

THE TWO BARNSTORMERS Mary Jane Waltz

Viv Massey (1893-1957) was a well-known Sydney fiddle player who teamed up with Thomas (Tom) Stevenson (B.1901) who played guitar, banjo, trombone and drums. Stevenson eventually joined Jim Davidson's Orchestra in the 1939s. We didn't record very much early country-inspired music and are lucky to have these two terrific tracks recorded in 1933.

CD TWO

THE TWO BARNSTORMERS Wildflower Waltz

A popular American country tune and it fairly rockets along.

TIM McNAMARA I've Got Five Dollars and It's Saturday Night

Tim McNamara (1922-1983) was our first 'singing cowboy' on film when he appeared in the 1948 feature film 'Into The Straight' where he sang two of his own songs, 'Riding Along' and 'We're Going to the Rodeo'. He went on to record for EMI and was one of our most popular radio hosts.

TIM McNAMARA WITH THE McKEAN SISTERS Red River Valley

Tim McNamara's radio programs introduced many artists to the Australian public including Heather and Joy McKean. Heather married Reg Lindsay and Joy married Slim Dusty. As the McKean sisters they recorded from 1951 for Rodeo records. They were recognised for their wonderful yodelling which was reminiscent of early Carter Family recordings. After their perspective marriages they pursued solo careers alongside their husbands. Joy became a notable songwriter and musical arranger and performed alongside her husband, Slim Dusty, for many years. Their daughter Anne Kirkpatrick continues their legacy.

REG LINDSAY The Country Hour

Reg Lindsay (1929-2008) first came to the stage as a performer on Tim McNamara's radio talent quest live show at Sydney Town Hall in 1951. He went on to become the host of that same program taking it to the position of most popular show on Australian radio, second to Jack Davey. Reg was a fantastic singer, guitar player and yodeller. He was a true star of Australian country music.

REG LINDSAY Then I'll Keep On Loving You

Soaring vocals like this gave Reg Lindsay radio chart successes that spanned several years. There is something magical in his early recordings and it is evident that his vocal style was distinctively Australian. Country love songs similar to this were regular chart visitors and even appeared on juke box playlists.

REG LINDSAY Down By the Old Slip Rail

(Reg Lindsay)

Reg Lindsay was not a prolific songwriter in his early days but when he did, he usually gave us something memorable. This is one of his originals. I often talked to Reg about the way the Australian 'country music mafia' tended to brand him as 'too American, too slick', referring to his American tours and Nashville recording sessions. He simply said he did it because he wanted to 'give it a go'. There is nothing too American about his early recordings. They are some of our best reminders as to how talented Reg Lindsay was as a pioneer performer.

QUEENIE AND DAVID KAILI When It's Springtime in the Rockies

The Kaili husband and wife duo were regulars on Reg Lindsay's hugely popular radio program The Bunkhouse Show. With clunking upright piano and steel guitar accompaniment for Queenie's high pitched crooning along with David's solid baritone makes this a country curiosity and the perfect introduction to the popularity of Hawaiian music in our country sound.

MAYO HUNTER Honolulu March

One cannot underestimate the influence Hawaiian music had on our early country music. It was featured at concerts, on recordings and live on air. Mayo Hunter was a multi-instrumentalist who recorded nine tracks for Columbia between 1926-1928, using Hawaiian and steel guitar. He later teamed up with 'Gladys' as a vaudeville act known as the Hawaiian Entertainers.

HARRY CASH The Black Yodel

This is a hell of a yodelling song that seems to bridge the patter between music hall and country music. Cash is a mystery to us music historians because during the 1920s on the vaudeville circuit he was billed as 'The Black Laugh' or 'The Black Laughter King'. This could mean he was an African, a Negro, an Aboriginal or, most likely, a black face artist. Wouldn't it be wonderful if he turned out to be our first indigenous country artist? The Register (Adelaide) reported his first stage appearance (as The Black Laugh) in December, 1926.

BUDDY WILLIAMS On the Gundagai Line

(R. 'Tex' Mogan)

Buddy Williams (1918-1986) loved telling the Australian story and he took those stories and songs across Australia performing in local halls, clubs, festivals. He was one of our best songwriters and also had a knack for selecting great country songs to sing including those of Woody Guthrie, Jimmie Rodgers, Jimmy Webster and, in this one, Tex Morton. Buddy's first recordings, for Regal Zonophone, were made in 1939 and he later recorded for Columbia and RCA.

BUDDY WILLIAMS The Overlander Trail

(Buddy Williams)

Buddy was known as the Yodelling Jackaroo and this song, self penned, was one of his most successful and lasting. Recorded in 1946, it smacks of real Australian country music that had come directly from the earliest of our country pioneers.

JOHNNY ASHCROFT Little Boy Lost

(Johnny Ashcroft)

Johnny Ashcroft (B. 1927) recorded his first record in 1946 when 'When I Waltzed My Matilda Away' was distributed to Australian radio stations. He became a country performer and notched up some major hits including Slim de Grey's 'The Girl Behind the Bar' and a series of sides in 19504 for Rodeo Records. In 1960 he and a radio announcer, Tony Withers, wrote another chart hit, a tearjerker, based on a true story of a four year old, Steven Walls, who was lost in the bush near Guyra, NSW. The lad was found alive and the song tore at everyone's heartstrings to make it a country classic.

CHAD MORGAN The Duckinwilla Dance

(Chad Morgan)

Recorded in 1955 this comic country song is typical of Chad Morgan stage persona as a country bumpkin. Country music has always had a clown and Chad is ours. In real life he is a rather shy and modest fellow who takes his craft seriously. Time has certainly been on Chad's side and he can claim an illustrious career as a tent show artist, radio and stage star and, of course, recording artist. His most famous song, The Sheik of Scrubby Creek is a perennial favourite for anyone interested in old time country humour.

CHAD MORGAN The Sheik of Scrubby Creek

(Chad Morgan)

This is the first song Chadwick Morgan (B. 1933) recorded and it has been part of his stage act ever since. Slim Dusty once referred to Chad as 'The crown prince of country comedy'. He recorded the Sheik for EMI's Regal Zonophone label in 1952 after winning a talent contest.

TEX CROFT Chicken Yodel

Wilf Carter, also known as Montana Slim, recorded this son g in the 1930s and West Australian singer and guitarist, Tex Croft, then recorded it. We know little of Croft other than he continued to perform in West Australia until the early 1960s. It is typical of several animal impersonation songs made popular on the Grand Ole Opera by artists such as Grandpa Jones type characters.

THE McKEAN SISTERS Where the Frangipani Grow

Sisters Heather and Joy McKean recorded this song in 1953. They had been performing and entering various talent shows including the popular Dick Fair Australian Amateur Hour. In 1949 they were enlisted as featured regulars on The melody Trail, a weekly country music program on Sydney radio station 2KY. It was so successful they stayed until the program ended in 1956.

SLIM DUSTY The Rain Still Tumbles Down

(Slim Dusty)

In the year 2000 EMI commissioned me to write part of the booklet that accompanied a 5CD set of Slim Dusty's 'The Man Who Is Australia'. I remember listening to the many tracks and being in awe of this man who became the voice of Australian country music. Its most important voice because it was always an Australian voice. David Gordon Kirkpatrick aka Slim Dusty (1927-2003) was a remarkable musician, singer, songwriter and showman selling millions of recordings and inspiring legions of supporters. He wrote his first country classic When the Rain Tumbles Down in July' in 1942 and recorded it a year later for Regal Zonaphone. It became one of his most requested songs and inspired this later song – a song about a song – recorded in 1953.

SMOKY DAWSON When the Bloom is on the Sage

(Fred Howard / Nat Vincent)

Smoky Dawson (1913-2008) was a country showman who soared to national popularity through radio. I grew up with Smoky Dawson. He was starring at me from the back of s cereal box every morning, he was in the Sunday comics and, of course, he was there every time I turned on the wireless. He was definitely 'country and western' and wasn't shy about saluting American country roots including bluegrass and western swing. He was a country gentleman.

SMOKY DAWSON Radio Serial Episode 110

This episode should put a smile on the face of any reader who was a member of Smoky Dawson's Wild West Club as you join Smoky's ever-bumbling, ever present sidekick Jingles as they take their listeners down the track on another adventure. Writing in 1985 Smoky said, "I like to think of myself as an old-fashioned troubadour trying to preserve a feeling for the Australian past in word, pictures and songs. My long rugged trail of experience has seen the light of joy and the shadow of sorrow."

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