Back in the Saddle Again
American Cowboy Songs

Sam Agins; Jules Verne Allen; Rex Allen; The Arizona Wranglers; Gene Autry; Wilf Carter; Slim Critchlow; Chris LeDoux; Girls of the Golden West; Van Holyoak; Harry Jackson; Ken Maynard; Mac McClintock; Patsy Montana; Glenn Ohrlin; Tex Owens; Powder River Jack and Kitty Lee; John G. Prude; Glen Rice and His Beverly Hill Billies; Riders in the Sky; Tex Ritter; Jimmie Rodgers; Sons of the Pioneers; Carl T. Sprague; Texas Ruby; John White; Marc Williams; Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys; and others
DISC I

1  THE OLD CHISHOLM TRAIL (Traditional) .......................... 3:25
   Harry "Haywire Mac" McClintock

2  THE POT WRASSLER (Traditional) ................................. 1:41
   Harry Jackson

3  THE GOL-DURNED WHEEL (Traditional) ............................. 3:31
   Van Holyoak

4  WHEN THE WORK'SALL DONETHIS FALL (D. J. O'Malley) ............ 2:51
   Carl T. Sprague

5  STREETS OF LAREDO (Traditional) ................................. 1:51
   John G. Prude

6  SIOUX INDIANS (Traditional) ....................................... 5:05
   Marc Williams

7  THE DYING COWBOY (Traditional) ................................. 3:18
   Jules Verne Allen

8  TYING A KNOT IN THE DEVIL'S TAIL (Gail Gardner) .................. 3:04
   Powder River Jack and Kitty Lee

9  STRAWBERRY ROAN (Curly Fletcher) .............................. 4:11
   Arizona Wranglers

10 THE LONE STAR TRAIL (Traditional) ............................... 3:09
   Ken Maynard

11 RIDGE RUNNIN' ROAN (Curly Fletcher) ............................ 3:08
   Glen Rice and His Beverley Hill Billies

12 WHOOPEE-TI-YI-YO (Traditional) ................................. 2:39
   John White

13 COWHAND'S LAST RIDE (J. Rodgers-Arza Hitt) ...................... 3:00
   Jimmie Rodgers

   (Southern Music Publishing)

DISC II

1  LITTLE OLD LOG SHACK I ALWAYS CALL MY HOME (W. Carter) .......... 3:06
   Will Carter (Montana Slim)

2  A-RIDIN' OLD PAINT (Traditional) ................................. 2:45
   Tex Ritter

3  I WANT TO BE A COWBOY'S SWEETHEART (P. Montana) ............... 3:04
   Patsy Montana

   (Duchess)

4  CATTLE CALL (Tex Owens) .......................................... 2:54
   Tex Owens

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5  ONE MORE RIDE (Bob Nolan) ......................................... 2:12
   Sons of the Pioneers

6  DIM NARROW TRAIL (Traditional) ................................. 2:26
   Texas Ruby

7  I WANT TO BE A REAL COWBOY GIRL (C. Prentis Forrester) .......... 3:26
   Girls of the Golden West

8  BACK IN THE SADDLE AGAIN (Gene Autry/Ray Whitley) ............... 3:34
   Gene Autry

   (Western Music Publishing Co.)

9  MY DEAR OLD ARIZONA HOME (F. Howard/N. Turner) .................. 1:44
   Rex Allen

10 COWBOY STOMP (Bob Willis/Tiny Moore) ............................ 2:22
    (Unichappell/Hill and Range)

   Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys

11 D-BAR-2 HORSE WRANGLER (D. J. O'Malley) .......................... 2:10
    Slim Critchlow

12 CITY BOARDERS (Agins?) ............................................. 1:28
    Sam Agins

13 THE COWBOY (Allen McCandless) .................................. 3:38
    Glenn Ohrlin

14 RUSTY SPURS (Chris Le Doux) ..................................... 3:28
    Chris Le Doux

   (C. Lucky Man Music)

15 COWBOY SONG (Woody Paul) ....................................... 3:00
    Riders in the Sky

   (Woody Paul/Buck Music)
The American infatuation with the heroic cowboy image has been reflected over the years not only in our literature and motion pictures, but in our music. Although the long cattle drives of the late 1800s, which gave rise to the true cowboy, were a thing of the past by the turn of the century, a hundred years later we still find ourselves enthralled by the cowboy and the symbol he has come to be in American culture. It is curious to find that an anachronistic form of occupational folk song is still of great interest today, providing inspiration for American popular music and evolving into a genre of “western” or pseudo-cowboy music ranging from the early radio “singing cowboys” of the 1920s to the urban cowboys of today. Through this music we have kept alive the personification of values which we Americans like to think are representative of our way of life: individual freedom, strength, self-reliance, toughness and honesty. We would still like to believe in the frontier virtues. Back in the Saddle Again examines the roots of cowboy and western music in the traditional occupational folk songs of the old-time working cowboy and traces its evolution through the popular, romantic cowboy theme songs of contemporary country music.

Authentic traditional cowboy songs are occupational folk songs, as are the songs of sailors, loggers and miners. They grew out of the day-to-day work experience and reflect the tasks and life of the working cowboy. In these songs we find a harsh realism as the cowboys deal with the business of herding cattle, the hardships and dangers of the drive, and the food and living conditions on the trail and in the cow camps.

Also usually considered cowboy songs are non-occupational western songs dealing with various other aspects of the frontier experience: outlaws, buffalo hunting, Indian fighting, women and immigration. These songs would often coexist with the occupational songs in the cowboy singers’ repertoire. Many cowboy songs had origins in folk songs from the British Isles. Some are reworked versions of older songs, such as “Streets of Laredo,” which can be traced back to a British broadside ballad, and “Bury Me Not on the Lone Prairie,” which is a cowboy version of the old sailors song “The Ocean Burial.”

Cowboys were not an illiterate lot; many were relatively educated men, seeking adventure in the West, escaping from the past or simply from the pressures of civilization. Some of them wrote a great deal of cowboy poetry, much of which found its way into print in newspapers and stock-growers’ journals. Often this verse became attached to old familiar folk or popular melodies and entered oral tradition as folk songs (John I. White's book Git Along Little Dogies is an excellent treatment of a number of these cowboy poet-songwriters).

In the relative isolation of the long trail drives, cowboys found they had to provide their own entertainment, and in this setting a rich folklore grew up, including tales and stories, jokes, recitations and songs. Most cowboys probably knew at least snatches of songs, but not many could carry much of a tune. As with any group, there were some who were natural entertainers, who had better voices, and who accumulated a larger repertore of songs. Most singing was rough and unaccompanied; while guitars might accompany a song back at the ranch, they did not really go on trail drives. The only instruments that found their way into a cowboy’s saddle bags were pocket-sized ones like the harmonica and Jew; harp, and perhaps an occasional fiddle.

The fifty-year period extending from just after the Civil War to just after the turn of the century was the era of the long cattle drive and the period which gave rise to most of the best traditional cowboy songs. Range cattle were rounded up and then herded up trails such as the Chisholm Trail and the Goodnight-Loving Trail to cattle shipping railroad towns like Dodge City and Abilene. Later; as the railroads extended into other areas of the west and southwest, such long trail drives became unnecessary. During this time, cowboy life turned into ranch life, and although the skills used in the roundup and trail drive were still used, the conditions of isolation from civilization and forms of popular entertainment, which nurtured the development of cowboy songs, no longer prevailed.

Much of today’s knowledge of the cowboy songs of this period is due to the work of early song collectors, like N. Howard “Jack” Thorp, himself a cowboy and writer of songs, and John Lomax. Their written collections and later field recordings of surviving old-time cowboy singers have helped to preserve the content and style of this important body of music. Early commercial recordings have also been important in this regard. During the 1920s, a number of authentic cowboy singers, like Charles Nabell, Carl T. Sprague, Jules Verne Allen and “Mac” McClintock, began to perform...
traditional cowboy songs on the radio and on records. As pioneers in the recording industry were discovering the potential in blues and hillbilly performers from the Southeast, they also began to realize the possible commercial potential in the cowboy material of the West and Southwest. These early recordings and radio appearances paved the way for the numerous “singing cowboys” who followed.

As the real cowboy began to become a part of history, the romantic image of the cowboy began to grow as well. This image had its roots in the works of Bret Harte and the dime novels of Ned Buntline, whose exaggerated accounts of western heroes like Buffalo Bill Cody and Wild Bill Hickock captured the American fancy. By the time the fledgling motion picture industry got a hold of the cowboy, he was already much larger than life. And he brought his songs with him to the movies.

The first movie appearance by a singing cowboy was Ken Maynard’s in Universal’s 1919 film _The Wagon Master_.

The transition in cowboy songs from reality to romance did not take long. Replacing the realism of songs like “The Old Chisholm Trail,” which dealt with the often unpleasant business of being a working cowboy, these new songs extolled the pleasures of riding the range, communing with nature and living the carefree life of the buckaroo. Although many singing cowboys like Tex Ritter and Rex Allen continued to include some traditional cowboy songs in their performances, their repertoires came to consist mostly of popular songs composed around cowboy and western themes.

Along with the change to composed popular songs, there was a change in musical style. While old-time cowboy singing had been mostly unaccompanied, the first commercial recordings (by Sprague, Allen and others) utilized very stark and simple guitar accompaniment. Occasionally a fiddle or harmonica might be included. This musical style fit well with the older songs, and focused attention on the content of the song rather than on the music itself. The new singing cowboys began to perform with bands, using not only guitars but fiddles, basses, accordions and other instruments associated with popular and country music. In keeping with the flavor of the newer songs, the singing became slick and polished, with sweet harmonies and vocal techniques borrowed from the popular music of the period.

It was the jazz age, and jazz had a tremendous impact on the developing western music. Musicians like Bob Wills forged a hot new style called western swing, a synthesis of southwestern fiddle and string band music with big band swing. This strong jazz and swing influence can be heard not only in the music of Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys, but in the instrumental music of groups like the Prairie Ramblers and the Sons of the Pioneers. Many of the movie cowboys, catapulted into prominence by their motion picture appearances, also became recording artists. Roy Rogers, Gene Autry, Tex Ritter and a number of others moved easily from screen to disc and into very successful careers in the music business. Whether on the screen or on records, this new breed of cowboy crooner was usually accompanied by these sweet, melodic and often hot and jazzy new western ensembles.

With public attention focused on the singing cowboys, it was not long before country performers from the Southeast and other parts of the country began to emulate the cowboy image as well. Performers who had never been on a horse began to dress in cowboy clothes, affect western manners and adopt names like “The Lone Star Cowboys,” “The Riders of The Purple Sage” and “The Golden West Cowboys.” Jimmie Rodgers, usually identified with the railroad and known as the “Singing Brakeman,” did a great deal to further the cowboy image in country music by being photographed in western clothes and recording songs like “When the Cactus Is in Bloom,” and “The Yodeling Cowboy.”

Women singers, too, began to capitalize on the popularity of the cowboy image. Billie Maxwell, a real cowgirl, was recording for RCA in 1929; by 1935, Patsy Montana had become the first woman in country music to record a million-seller; “I Want To Be a Cowboy’s Sweetheart.” Other cowgirl singers, such as The Girls of the Golden West and Texas Ruby, were becoming very popular. The eclipse of the hillbilly image in country music by the cowboy image is a phenomenon that has continued to the present time. Apparently, both performer and audience are more attracted by cowboy symbolism than the rube hillbilly image exploited during the early days of country music.

Over the years, the cowboy has tended to personify America’s prevailing concept of the heroic, and the cowboy image has changed accordingly. As the “good guy white hats” began to be replaced with more realistic anti-heroes, the cowboy’s image has moved toward characters like the Outlaw Josie Wales or Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid. In country and western music, this change is paralleled by the development of the cowboy as alienated tough guy, exemplified in Marty Robbins’ gunfighter ballads, or later as Willie Nelson’s _Red Headed Stranger_. The emergence of the so-called “outlaw” movement in country music has further enhanced the image of the renegade. (This “outlaw” movement developed ostensibly as a rebellion against Nashville and took Austin, Texas, as its center.)
Recently there has been a great resurgence in songs with cowboy themes, with many of these contemporary songs portraying cowboys as romantic loners and misfits, as in Ed Bruce’s “Mamas Don’t Let Your Babies Grow Up To Be Cowboys.” The ultimate exploitation of the current cowboy craze, of course, was the movie Urban Cowboy; with its resultant vogue of cowboy dress and other things western.

While popular “western” music early on replaced the authentic cowboy song in the marketplace, there have remained a few small enclaves where occupationally related cowboy songs have continued to be sung and, occasionally, recorded. As rodeo has become a major sporting event across the country, a few individuals, like Johnny Baker and Chris LeDoux, have composed songs based on their rodeo experiences and have sometimes recorded or performed traditional cowboy songs as well. Although their songs are, in a sense, occupational, they really have more in common, in style and nostalgic, romantic approach, with mainstream cowboy country songs than with authentic cowboy music.

There are also a few authentic cowboy singers still active today, but they appear much more often in a folk festival or on a dude ranch than in a roundup. Glenn Ohrlin is probably the best-known contemporary cowboy singer. A former rodeo rider and working cowboy (who now owns a cattle ranch in Arkansas), he performs frequently at folk festivals throughout the country. Slim Critchlow, late of California, and Van Holyoak of Clay Springs, Arizona, were also important authentic singers who attracted considerable attention from folklorists and cowboy-song enthusiasts.

One other area which has provided a forum for the old-time cowboy songs is the dude ranch. Singin’ Sam Agins of Sedona, Arizona, for example, has been performing on a dude ranch circuit from the Mexican border to Canada since the 1940s, entertaining dude ranch patrons at evening campfires.

While there has been little direct musical influence upon American country and popular music by authentic cowboys and their traditional songs, there is definitely a continuing thread that connects them. The media cowboy-western music did not actually borrow content or style from cowboy folk songs, but it was certainly inspired by them and appropriated its images and themes (though somewhat romanticized) from them. The performers and selections included on these two discs provide examples of the complete spectrum of cowboy and cowboy-based music, from field recordings of actual working cowboys through media cowboys of the 1920s and 1930s to the urban cowboys of today. Such an inclusive overview of this entire body of material can help us develop a proper perspective on the cowboy in American country and popular music, as well as in American culture in general.

CHARLIE SEEMANN, a native of Arizona, is Curator of Collections at the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum in Nashville. He was previously a folklorist for the National Park Service, and taught folklore and folk music at Moorpark College, in California. He holds an M.A. in Folklore from UCLA.
the rigors of cowboying, cooks seemed to have earned a reputation for being cantankerous and mean. Many songs tell of the horrible “chuck” produced by camp cooks, while some praise him for his good food. Only a few, such as this, give the cook’s point of view.

"The Pot Wrassler,” sung here in traditional unaccompanied style, is one of a number of songs about camp cooks. Traditionally an occupation of punchers grown too old for the rigors of cowboying, cooks seemed to have earned a traditional occupation of punchers grown too old for the rigors of cowboying, cooks seemed to have earned a

"The Gol-Durned Wheel" is one of a number of cowboy songs which reflects a clash of technologies—with hilarious results. Although ballad scholars had doubted that the text was meant to be sung to the familiar tune of the same name by Charles Harris, this practice was somehow never adopted. The song found its way into oral tradition with the melody heard on this recording.

"When the Work’s All Done This Fall" vividly tells of the dangers confronting cowboys working with herds of longhorn steers. The song originally entitled “After the Ball”; and although the text was meant to be sung to the familiar tune (of the same name) by Charles Harris, this practice was somehow never adopted. The song found its way into oral tradition with the melody heard on this recording.

An entire chapter of John I. White’s Git Along Little Dogies
is devoted to the Montana cowboy-poet D.J. O'Malley who wrote "When the Work's All Done This Fall" as well as a number of other well-known cowboy songs, often under pseudonyms "Kid" White, D.J. White, and Iyam B. Usted. "When the Work's All Done This Fall" was published in the October 6, 1893 Stock Growers' Journal; yet it has long been considered a traditional song in the public domain, and, although the song has been recorded some forty times over the years since the Sprague recording of 1925, O'Malley never received any compensation.

**Track 5**

**Streets of Laredo**  
*(traditional)*  
This recording of John G. Prude singing "Streets of Laredo" was made in Fort Davis, Texas, in 1942, by folklorist John A. Lomax on portable recording equipment. Not much information is given about Mr. Prude in the notes that accompany the Library of Congress album on which this recording originally appeared. We are told that he was at one time a working cowboy. His singing represents the authentic singing style probably heard in the cow camps of the late 1800s: a very straightforward, unaffected, unaccompanied performance by an untrained singer.  
The origins of many cowboy songs lie in the folk songs of the British Isles; "Streets of Laredo" derives from the old British broadside ballad "The Unfortunate Rake," which is about a soldier who is dying of syphilis and requests a military funeral.

**Track 6**

**Sioux Indians**  
*(traditional)*  
Marc Williams; 1928. Decca 5011.  
Not much is known about Marc Williams, except that he made some excellent recordings of cowboy songs during the 1920s. Apparently he was a performer of cowboy songs for about ten years, and he also performed in the 1930s as "Happy Hank" on a children's program on station WHO in Des Moines, Iowa. According to a brief article written about him during that time, he was a native Texan and actually worked as a cowboy from Texas to Montana, before deciding to become a professional singer. Unlike many of the early media cowboys, Williams has a very melodious voice and may have had vocal training. Despite his practical experience as a cowboy, his recordings offer a song-book accuracy, rather than the flexibility with text and versing usually associated with oral tradition music. This suggests that he probably used the early collections of cowboy songs by Thorp and Lomax to enlarge and polish his repertoire.  
"Sioux Indians" is not an occupational cowboy song, but a song that is sung wherever there is a heritage of overland migration throughout the West. It is a beautifully etched song, sparse and simple, that unfolds its story of bloody Indian battles with a disturbing realism. Williams' rendition is a very tasteful and effective one; he lets the song tell its story, unmarred by obtrusive histrionics or inappropriate accompaniment.

**Track 7**

**The Dying Cowboy**  
*(traditional)*  
Jules Verne Allen; 1929. Originally released on Victor 23834.  
Jules Verne Allen was born in 1883 in Ellis County, Texas. He began ranch work at the age of ten and became an experienced cowboy, participating in long trail drives. He learned to play the guitar and often performed for his fellow ranch hands. As he began to perform professionally, he brought his songs from the cow camps to radio stations WFFA in Dallas, and WFI and KNX in Los Angeles. In 1928 he began to record for Victor.  
Allen also composed some songs drawing on his own experience. In 1933 he published an interesting little volume entitled *Cowboy Lore*, which contained thirty-six songs with piano accompaniment, descriptions of cowboy clothing and gear, explanations of cattle brands and ear marks and a glossary of western words. It was reprinted by Naylor Co. in 1971. Allen, along with Charles Nabell and Carl T. Sprague, is one of the most important of the early, authentic, singing cowboys. He died in 1945.  
"The Dying Cowboy," or "Bury Me Not on the Lone Prairie," is a cowboy adaptation of an earlier composed song which had entered into sea song tradition, *The Ocean Burial*. Written by the Reverend Edwin H. Chapin, the song begins "Oh, bury me not in the deep, deep sea." It was published in 1839 and copyrighted in 1850 as the work of George N. Allen. It offers a classic example of the process of oral tradition at work: a composed, published song enters into oral tradition and is eventually passed along and transformed into a very different entity, localized in a new setting, with deep meaning for a whole and entirely different group of people. There are a number of recorded instances of individuals who at various times worked both as sailors and as cowboys. Charles J. Finger, in his little 1923 booklet, *Sailor Chanties and Cowboy Songs*, gives some very interesting accounts of interaction between sailors and cowboys, and of the way songs of one occupation would be swapped with songs from the other. Thus may possibly be explained the evolution of a sailor song into one of the most poignant and moving of cowboy ballads.

**Track 8**

**Tying a Knot in the Devil's Tail**  
*(traditional)*  
Jules Verne Allen; 1929. Originally released on Victor 23834.  
Powder River Jack Lee, from Deer Lodge, Montana, was a cowboy singer widely known throughout the west and southwest, and many singers remember learning songs from him. He and his wife, Kitty Lee, made four recordings in 1930. Lee had a reputation for exaggeration, often claiming to have written songs not his own, including "Tying a Knot in the Devil's Tail," as well as songs he published in 1934, in *Powder River Jack and Kitty Lee's Cowboy Song Book*. Lee was killed in an automobile accident in 1945.  
The true author of this song is Gail I. Gardner (born in 1892) of Prescott, Arizona. While the song is an imaginary account of two drunken cowboys roping, branding and dehorning the Devil, it captures in song an amazingly accurate account of how Arizona cowboys roped and branded cattle.
Goddam Cattle
singing two traditional cowboy songs, “The Lone Star Trail”
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The Lone Star Trail is a typical trail-herding song, telling
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than those which were to be featured in later motion pictures by other singers.

Strawberry Roan
(Curly Fletcher)
Arizona Wranglers: 1929. Originally released as special limited edition
Christmas record in 1929, Merry Xmas L949; reissued on RAR-Arts LP 1000.

The Arizona Wranglers, one of the early cowboy bands, included some actual working cowboys, such as Romaine Lowdermilk (of Wickenburg, Arizona), Charles Hunter, J. E. Patterson, Laverne Costello and Charles English. During the late 1920s and early 1930s they performed in Phoenix, most notably at the Arizona Biltmore Hotel and over local radio station KTAR. Later the group (minus Lowdermilk) traveled to Los Angeles, added some new members and performed on station KNX for about five years. This recording, released in a very limited private pressing intended as Christmas presents for friends, features “Nubbins,” who was actually J. E. Patterson.

Like many cowboy songs that have circulated in oral tradition, the “Strawberry Roan” has come to be considered as an anonymous folk ballad. The author of this piece was actually Curly Fletcher, one of the more prolific cowboy poets. Born in San Francisco in 1892, he grew up in the Owens Valley, where he learned to be a cowboy. The poem was originally published in several newspapers and magazines under the title “The Outlaw Broncho,” before Fletcher changed the name to “Strawberry Roan” in 1917 and included it in a collection of his western verse entitled Rhymes of the Roundup. By the 1920s someone had put a tune to it, and over the years it has remained one of the most popular of cowboy songs, inspiring numerous parodies, including “Ridge Running Roan.” Western folk song authority Austin Fife deals extensively with this song and its parodies in “The Strawberry Roan and His Progeny” (Autumn 1972 issue of the John Edwards Memorial Foundation Quarterly). Fletcher died in 1954.

The Lone Star Trail
(traditional)
Ken Maynard; 1930. Originally released on Columbia 2310 D.
Ken Maynard is usually credited as the first motion picture singing cowboy; he appeared in The Wagon Master in 1929, singing two traditional cowboy songs, “The Lone Star Trail” and “The Cowboy’s Lament.” In 1933, he starred in a film The Strawberry Roan, singing Curly Fletcher’s title song. Maynard also gets credit for introducing Gene Autry to movie audiences in the 1934 film In Old Santa Fe. Maynard recorded eight cowboy songs for Columbia in 1930. One of the more authentic of the singing cowboys, Maynard had been a rodeo rider and a stunt man. His singing, rustic when compared with the warblings of a Gene Autry or Roy Rogers, did not carry him to the heights some later singing cowboys achieved. Nevertheless, he was a well-known movie cowboy for two decades. He died in 1973.

“The Lone Star Trail” is a typical trail-herding song, telling of the hard work, the loneliness and the dangers a cowboy faces. We find him torn between his compulsion to follow herds of longhorns up the trail, and a longing to settle down on his own ranch with a wife. The song presents a far more realistic and authentic picture of the cowboy’s lot than those which were to be featured in later motion pictures by other singers.

Ridge Runnin’ Roan
(Curly Fletcher)
Glen Rice and His Beverly Hill Billies: 1932. Originally released on Brunswick 599; reissued on RAR-Arts.

The Beverly Hill Billies were one of the most important radio cowboy bands to be based in the Hollywood-Los Angeles area. It seems a strange name for a cowboy band to take, especially at a time when cowboy dress and western names were in vogue; however, it was a gimmick that worked very well for them. On station KMPC, where they had a regular radio show, they masqueraded as real hillbillies who had been discovered living in the hills outside of Los Angeles.

Originally made up of Leo “Zeke Craddock” Mannes, Tom Murray and Cyprian “Ezra Longnecker” Paulette, the group changed personnel a great deal. A number of performers who would become well known in their own right were at one time members of the group: Elton Britt, Stuart Hamblen, Wesley Tuttle, Lloyd Perryman and Glen Rice. Rice later reorganized the group, and it was that personnel which recorded this fine version of “Ridge Running Roan.”

With changes in members, the group remained popular into the late 1930s. Ken Griffis has written a good history of the Beverly Hill Billies, which was printed in the Spring 1980 John Edwards Memorial Foundation Quarterly. “Ridge Runnin’ Roan” was one of several parodies of Curly Fletcher’s “Strawberry Roan.” A remarkable song, “Ridge Running Roan” was included by Fletcher in Songs Of the Sage, which he published in 1931.

Whoopee-Ti-Yi-Yo
(traditional)

John I. White was known to his radio and record audiences as “The Lonesome Cowboy.” He was a true media cowboy, having never worked as an actual cowboy; he developed an interest in traditional cowboy songs when he met rancher and cowboy singer Romaine Lowdermilk. When White en-
tered graduate school at Columbia University in 1924, he took his guitar with him and began to perform on stations WEAF and WOR in 1926. By 1931 he had recorded twenty songs for the American Record Company which were released on a variety of labels including Perfect, Conquerer and Banner.

If White more or less retired from performing, but over the years he has written some of the most important literature on cowboy songs. In 1975 he published *Git Along Little Dogies: Songs and Songmakers of the American West*, an excellent book that deals extensively with many of the cowboy-poets who authored some of our best-known cowboy songs, and who, but for White's work, would have remained all but anonymous except to a very small handful of scholars and historians.

"Whoopee-Ti-Yi-Yo" is one of the oldest and best-known of the old-time cowboy songs. It is modeled on an old Irish piece, "Rocking the Cradle." References to this song appear in the writings of authors like Owen Wister and Andy Adams as they describe life on the cattle drives. It was included in John Lomax's 1910 edition of *Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads* and in Carl Sandburg's 1927 *American Songbag*. Like other true cowboy songs, it describes the work of the cowboy and gives us insight into the business of driving cattle.

**Track 13**

*Cowhand's Last Ride*  
(J. Rodger-Arza Hitt)

Jimmie Rodgers; 1933. Originally released on Victor 24456.

Jimmie Rodgers, known as the "Father of Country Music," is usually not thought of as a singing cowboy, although in actuality he probably did as much as anyone to popularize the cowboy image with country music performers. Born in Meridian, Mississippi, in 1897, Rodgers had a brief career that ended with his death from tuberculosis in 1933.

He made his first recordings in 1927, and his six years of recording left an indelible imprint on American music. Having worked on the railroads until his health gave out, Rodgers cultivated the image of a railroader and was known as "The Singing Brakeman." Like others of his time, however, he was also taken with the West, especially the state of Texas, where he moved and built a home. He recorded a number of songs based on a cowboy theme, including "When the Cactus Is in Bloom," "Yodeling Cowboy," and "Cowhand's Last Ride." There are several well-known photos of Rodgers wearing cowboy outfits or boots and cowboy hat (although Nolan Porterfield, in his definitive biography *Jimmie Rodgers: The Life and Times of America's Blue Yodeler* says there is no evidence Rodgers actually performed in western attire.

Rodgers was responsible for popularizing yodeling, which became an extremely important element of the new genre of western music. There is no evidence that real cowboys yodeled, although some of the calls they used in herding cattle might have sounded similar to yodeling. (More likely, the yodel was introduced to this country by troupes of traveling Swiss yodelers.)

"Cowhand's Last Ride" is mostly the work of Arza Hitt. It is typical of the pseudo cowboy songs of Tin Pan Alley and popular with the media cowboys. It evokes images that would become clichés: prairies, rustlers, moonlit nights, campfires and a brave cowboy who dies fighting with a gun in his hand. The song was recorded in one of Rodgers' last sessions, just days before his death, and was released as a memorial record in July of 1933.

**DISC II**

**Track 1**

*Little Old Log Shack*  
(W. Carter)  
Wilf Carter (Montana Slim); 1934. Originally released on Victor Bluebird 4976.

Canadian Wilf Carter was born in Nova Scotia in 1904. A cowboy and rodeo performer, he was an extremely important transitional figure in the development from authentic cowboy songs to composed western pseudo-cowboy songs. One of many performers strongly influenced by Jimmie Rodgers, Carter became an accomplished yodeler. He began to perform during the early 1930s on radio station CFCN in Calgary, Alberta. About the same time he launched a recording career with RCA Victor in New York. (For appearances in the United States he adopted the name "Montana Slim.")

Carter performed many traditional cowboy songs, such as the "Strawberry Roan" as well as many of the over 500 songs he wrote himself. Carter presently makes his home in Tavares, Florida.

"Little Old Log Shack I Always Call My Home" is a typical cowboy song; while it glorifies the happy cowboy life, it is still tinged with a bit of realism. The song utilizes western song clichés—images of the omnipresent howling coyotes, moonlit nights, singing birds, horses and sweethearts—and displays Carter's awesome yodeling ability.

**Track 2**

*A–Ridin' Old Paint*  
(traditional)  
Tex Ritter; 1933. Originally released on Conqueror 8144.

Woodward Maurice "Tex" Ritter was born in Panola County, Texas, in 1905. Ritter attended the University of Texas and Northwestern University; he had planned to go into law, but decided instead on a career in show business. During the 1930s, he appeared in five Broadway plays and, while in New York, began both his radio and recording careers. Ritter moved to Hollywood in 1936 and starred in over sixty films. He also continued his singing career and was one of country music's most popular entertainers during the 1940s.

In the 1960s Ritter moved to Nashville, where he joined the Grand Ole Opry, ran unsuccessfully for the U.S. Senate and helped to establish the Country Music Hall of Fame, to which he was elected in 1964. Tex Ritter was another important transitional figure whose work, taken as a whole, falls somewhere between that of the traditional and the media cowboy singer. While he included traditional songs, like "A–Ridin' Old Paint," in his repertoire, most of his hits came with composed western theme songs, such as "Jingle, Jangle, Jingle," "High Noon," and "I Dreamed of a Hillbilly Heaven."

"A–Ridin' Old Paint," also known as "I Ride an Old Paint," is a classic herding song, in the mold of "Git Along Little Dogies" ("Whoopee-Ti-Yi-Yo") and "Night-Herding Song."
I Want To Be A Cowgirl's Sweetheart

(P. Montana)
Patsy Montana; 1935. Originally released on Okeh 03010.

Patsy Montana, whose real name is Rubye Blevins, is the archetypal singing cowgirl. More than any other performer, she pioneered the cowgirl image and helped to develop the genre of western music. Born in Arkansas in 1912, she took an early interest in music, learning to play guitar and fiddle. She later moved to California, attending college in Los Angeles, and was exposed to the media cowboy performers based in the Hollywood area. Making some early attempts at solo performance, she went on to form a trio called “The Montana Cowgirls,” who were well received on the West Coast. By 1932, she was performing alone as Montana's Yodelling Cowgirl. In 1933, she joined forces with The Prairie Ramblers, a fine western swing-influenced string band and together they became favorites on Chicago's WLS Barn Dance. One of the songs they recorded was “I Want To Be A Cowboy's Sweetheart.” Patsy Montana is still active as a performer today.

“I Want To Be A Cowboy's Sweetheart,” which Montana wrote, became the first million-selling record by a female country music singer. Montana sings of participating as an equal in the exciting cowboy world—a concept that was to be the model for many future cowgirl songs. An excellent article on Montana, “Patsy Montana and the Development of the Cowgirl Image,” by Robert Oermann and Mary Bufwack, appeared in Volume VIII, number 8, of The Journal of Country Music.

Cattle Call

(Tex Owens)
Tex Owens; 1935. Originally released on Decca 5015.

Tex Owens was born in Texas in 1892. A popular radio performer and personality, he co-hosted the Brush Creek Follies on station KMBC and appeared on the WLW Boone County Jamboree and on other radio stations. His sister, Texas Ruby (who also appears in this anthology), was a long-time performer on the Grand Ole Opry. His daughter, Laura Lee, was for a long time the girl singer with Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys, and later performed with her husband Dickie McBride. Owens is best known for writing and recording “Cattle Call.”

Although Owens recorded “Cattle Call” in 1935, most people remember Eddy Arnold’s recording from 1955. Arnold’s performance (accompanied by the Hugo Winterhalter Orchestra) hints at country music’s drift toward pop styles. The song is a powerful one, the lonesome wail of the “cattle call” imparting a feeling of mournful isolation. It is inspired by the cattle calls the cowboys used while they rode night herd. The purpose of the call was to let the cattle know the herdsmen were there, so they would not be startled, and also to let other night herdsmen know the singer’s location with respect to the herd.

One More Ride

(Bob Nolan)
Sons of the Pioneers; 1940. Orthoacoustic Transcription 064093-1.

No group has made more of an impact, or enjoyed greater longevity, than the Sons of the Pioneers. The group, formed in 1934, was originally a vocal trio accompanied by guitar; it was made up of Roy Rogers (then known as Leonard Slye), Tim Spencer and Bob Nolan. Known as the Pioneer Trio, they became the Sons of the Pioneers with the addition of Hugh and Karl Farr.

The Pioneers were known for their harmony singing and the evocative western songs they performed; many of them, such as “Cool Water” and “Tumbling Tumbleweeds” were written by Spencer and Nolan.

The Farr brothers were virtuoso instrumentalists, contributing hot jazz and western swing-influenced accompaniment. (Karl Farr’s guitar playing has been compared to that of Django Rheinhardt, while Hugh’s fiddle playing reflects the influence of jazz violinists like Joe Venuti and Stephane Grappelli.) The group—with changes in personnel—has remained active over the years.

Bob Nolan’s “One More Ride” is a classic of the western genre, drawing on favorite western themes: the railroad, the prairie, prairie dogs and tumbleweeds. The song is highly reminiscent of and written as a sequel to, Nolan’s “Way Out There.”

(Note: While this song was released on both the Decca and RCA Victor labels, this particular recording is taken from a 1940 Hollywood Orthoacoustic Radio Recordings transcription disc. It was reissued on JEMF 102.)

Dim Narrow Trail

(traditional)

Texas Ruby, sister of Tex Owens (well known for his song, “Cattle Call”), was born in 1910 in Wise County, Texas. She came to the Grand Ole Opry in 1934 with Zeke Clements and his Broncho Busters. In 1937 she teamed up with Curly Fox (whom she later married). They were a top country act, most popular on the Grand Ole Opry during the 1940s. Later, they appeared regularly on KPRC-TV in Houston. Also during the 1940s they recorded for the Columbia and King labels, and in the 1960s for Starday. Texas Ruby died in 1963.

“Dim Narrow Trail” is a shortened version of a longer song variously known as “The Cowboy's Dream,” “The Cowboy's Sweet By and By,” and “The Grand Roundup.” This recording of “Dim Narrow Trail” is from Hollywood radio transcriptions probably dating from 1947 or 1948. They were made by MacGregor Studios and leased to various radio stations, which played them as part of their country and western programming.
I Want to Be a Real Cowboy Girl
(C. Prentis Forrester)

The Girls of the Golden West were sisters, Mildred and Dorothy Good, who claimed to be from Muleshoe, Texas. Mildred was born in 1913, and Dorothy in 1915. As children, they were exposed to traditional cowboy songs, and the rest were pop standards. The Girls of the Golden West were known for their sweet harmony singing and harmony yodeling.

Composed by C. Prentis. Forrester, this song is very similar to Patsy Montana's "I Want To Be a Cowboy's Sweetheart," expressing a woman's desire to work and ride alongside her cowboy and to enjoy the same lifestyle and freedom on the open range.

Track 5
Back in the Saddle Again
(Gene Autry-Ray Whitley)
Gene Autry; 1939. Originally released on Okeh 05080.

Gene Autry was born in Texas in 1907. His mother taught him to play guitar. Before he was out of high school, he had joined a medicine show. In 1925 he took a job as a railroad telegrapher, and in 1930 he began performing as "Oklahoma's Singing Cowboy" on radio station KVOO in Tulsa.

In his early days Autry patterned himself after Jimmie Rodgers; some of his early recordings sound so much like "The Singing Brakeman," one has difficulty detecting the difference. Autry then moved to the WLS Barn Dance in Chicago. While there, he recorded "Silver-Haired Daddy of Mine," which sold some five million copies. Autry next went to Hollywood, where he appeared in the Ken Maynard film In Old Santa Fe. From there, his career as America's premiere singing movie cowboy was assured. Autry has enjoyed an extremely successful career as movie actor, recording artist, and businessman. In 1969 he was elected to the Country Music Hall of Fame.

"Back in the Saddle," which was to become Autry's theme song, was written by Autry with fellow cowboy singer Ray Whitley. It was featured in Republic's 1941 movie, Back in the Saddle, starring Autry.

Track 6
My Dear Old Arizona Home
(F. Howard-N. Turner)
Rex Allen; late 1950s or early 1960s. M. M. Cole transcription 4096.

Rex Allen, known as "The Arizona Cowboy," was born in Willcox, Arizona, in 1924. Unlike many media cowboys, Allen had actual experience as a cowboy, riding in rodeos when he was a teen-ager. By the mid-1940s, Allen had learned to play guitar and fiddle and was performing on radio station WTTM in Trenton, New Jersey. In 1951, he had his own radio show for CBS in Hollywood. He has recorded for Decca, Mercury and Buena Vista, has appeared in numerous western films and is also well known for his narration of numerous Walt Disney productions. Allen, who is still actively performing, is the last of the singing movie cowboys.

"My Dear Old Arizona Home" is a perfect example of the Tin Pan Alley-produced pseudo-cowboy song. Written by Fred Howard and Nat Vincent, a professional Hollywood songwriter and acting duo who performed as "The Happy Chappies," the song strings together western images, evoking everything from mooing cows to sage to horses and hooting owls. Of course, there is the "blushing bride" waiting for her cowboy at the end of the trail. This recording, made with Allen's group, The Arizona Wranglers (not the much earlier group of the same name), was taken from an M. M. Cole radio transcription, probably from one of Allen's 1950s radio programs.

Track 10
Cowboy Stomp
(Bob Wills-Tiny Moore)

Born in Limestone County, Texas, in 1905, Bob Wills was the son of a well-known champion fiddler. Wills is credited with being the creator of western swing, a synthesis of old-time Texas fiddling and the big band swing sound of the 1930s. He began playing for square dances at an early age, moving on to medicine shows and his own bands. In the early 1930s he was a member of the pioneer western swing group The Light Crust Doughboys.

Leaving the Doughboys in 1933, Wills moved to Tulsa, forming his band, The Texas Playboys, and appearing on radio station KVOO. Wills added many big band instruments to his string band, and by the 1940s the band had grown to some eighteen members. Their musicianship and popularity easily rivalled those of the big bands of the Dorsey brothers and Benny Goodman. Wills later moved his band to California, where it enjoyed immense popularity. Western swing, now undergoing a revival, has remained one of the most popular American musical styles. Wills continued to perform until 1969 when health problems forced him into retirement. He died in 1975.

"Cowboy Stomp" was written by Wills and pioneer western swing and jazz mandolinist Tiny Moore, a member of The Texas Playboys. It is typical of The Playboys' dance music.

Track 11
D-Bar-2 Horse Wrangler
(D. J. O'Malley)
Slim Critchlow; originally released on Arhoolie, LP 5007, Slim Critchlow "Cowboy Song."

Slim Critchlow was one of a few cowboy and ex-cowboy performers who continued, in recent years, to perform traditional cowboy songs like those of the old-time trail drives. Critchlow was born in Pennsylvania, moved with his family to Utah, and then to Oklahoma and California. Along the way he developed an interest in horses, and a couple of years later he moved to Idaho and got a job as a cowboy on the HK Ranch.
He pursued a checkered career as a member of the 145th National Guard Field Artillery (then horse drawn) and a National Park Service Ranger in Zion and Bryce Canyon national parks. All these jobs allowed him to continue his association with horses and to do a little rodeoing on the side.

Slim also learned to play the guitar and got to know cowboy songs from the old-timers he met. During the 1930s he performed with a cowboy band on station KDL in Salt Lake City and later with the “Utah Buckaroos” on station KSL. Critchlow moved to California in 1936. He was “discovered” by folk music enthusiasts around 1959, and he played at folk festivals and concerts, and even did a few television appearances. Critchlow died in 1969.

The “D-Bar-2 Horse Wrangler” is another song credited to cowboy poet D. J. O’Malley. Also known as “The Tenderfoot” and “The Horse Wrangler,” it was published in 1894 in the Stock Grouser Journal. It is a very amusing song about a greenhorn who decides to try being a cowboy. O’Malley wrote the song to be sung to the melody of the popular vaudeville song “The Day I Played Base Ball.” Like others of O’Malley’s works, this song passed into oral tradition and became known as a folk song.

Track 12
City Boarders
(Agins?)
Singin’ Sam Agins; early 1970s. Originally released on Haywire Records ARA 6419.

Singin’ Sam Agins, now a long-time resident of Sedona, Arizona, was born in Denver, Colorado, in 1919. Ten years later, Sam’s family moved to Corona, California, a favorite resettlement point for many “Okie” families fleeing the Dust Bowl conditions of the 1930s. It was a rural area, but close enough for people to commute into the Los Angeles metropolitan area to work. Consequently, many families who would have felt extremely uncomfortable in a large city found the Corona area exactly what they were looking for.

Much old-time music migrated with these people, and from them Sam learned his first traditional music. He picked up guitar and fiddle when he was quite young, and by the time he was in high school, he was playing for square dances. His love for horses and “cowboy culture” was to remain with him for the rest of his life.

After World War II, Agins moved to Sedona, where he became an accomplished jeweler. He began to sell his western jewelry at dude ranches all over the West. As early as 1939, he had started traveling around the western states, playing and singing. He soon found that a symbiotic relationship existed between his jewelry making and his music: by performing the old cowboy songs a dude ranch clientele wanted to hear, he developed an audience for his songs and a ready market for his jewelry. Eventually, he made two home recordings. In 1971, he was invited to perform at the Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife, in Washington, D.C. Since then, he has been performing not only at dude ranches, but at festivals and concerts throughout the West.

“City Boarders” reflects the context in which Sam Agins performs. In it we find the clash of cultures and lifestyles that marked the transition of the “Old West.” I have been unable to find any information on this song; even Agins, who has collected hundreds of songs in his travels, does not remember exactly where he got it. A friend in Tucson insists that he and Sam wrote it while sitting around the campfire drunk one night in the 1940s. Whatever its origin, it captures in verse the attitude of the working cowboy toward “dude wrangling.”

Track 13
The Cowboy
(Allen McCandless)

Of all the authentic cowboy singers active in the United States today, Glenn Ohrlin is probably the best known and the best. He was born in Minnesota in 1926 of Swedish immigrant parents. His family moved to California several years later; and when he was about sixteen, he left home to work as a cowboy in Nevada. He rode bareback broncs in rodeos all during the 1940s, except for the time he spent in the Army.

Ohrlin had learned to play guitar from an aunt when he was young, and over the years he learned numerous cowboy songs. In 1954, he settled on his own ranch in the Ozarks, near Mountain View, Arkansas. During the folk music revival of the 1960s, Ohrlin began to perform at folk festivals and concerts and became widely admired for his authentic and understated performing style. He has appeared in several recorded anthologies and has issued two LPs of cowboy songs.

One of Ohrlin’s greatest contributions has been as a student of the cowboy song. His personal experiences have made him particularly qualified to comment on the cowboy song tradition. His 1973 book, The Hell-Bound Train, is a masterpiece of cooperation between folk performer and the academic community, containing not only Ohrlin’s songs and his own commentary, but invaluable bibliographical and discographical information as well.

“The Cowboy,” also known as “The Cowboy’s Soliloquy,” comes from yet another printed poem, this one by Allen McCandless, first printed in the Trinidad, Colorado, Daily Advertiser in 1885. A widely popular cowboy song, it is also a very literary one, containing quotations from Shakespeare and references to biblical characters, while describing the life of the cowboy.

Track 14
Rusty Spurs
(Chris Le Doux)

Chris Le Doux, a professional rodeo rider, performs not only traditional cowboy songs, but also writes contemporary country songs about the rodeo. Le Doux was born in Mississippi and learned about horses and riding on his grandfather’s farm in Michigan. Later, his family moved to Texas. He developed an interest in both music and rodeo and participated first in saddle, bronc, and bull riding, later specializing in bareback bronc riding. (In 1976 he was World Champion Bareback Bronc Rider.)

LeDoux has created his own recording company, Lucky
Man Music, and has issued a string of “homemade” albums, for which there is a ready audience among rodeo fans. Le Doux now lives on a sheep ranch he owns in Wyoming.

“Rusty Spurs” is a nostalgic song—similar to several traditional cowboy songs like “The Campfire Has Gone Out,” “I’d Like To Be in Texas” and “Make Me a Cowboy Again for a Day”—about an old man reflecting upon memories of his earlier years as a rodeo rider. It is interesting to note that, musically, the song is in contemporary country style, rather than revived “cowboy” or early “western” style.

Track 15
Cowboy Song
(Woody Paul)

Just as there has been a revival of interest in western swing, the surge of interest in western music and culture has produced a revival in other popular cowboy forms. Riders in The Sky is a Nashville-based vocal and instrumental trio who perform in the tradition of the Sons of the Pioneers, featuring tight vocal harmonies and hot instrumental accompaniment. They are excellent practitioners of a difficult style.

While they do perform many of the old Sons of the Pioneers and other western groups, Riders in the Sky are also excellent composers, many of whose songs are worthy of comparison with those of Bob Nolan or Tim Spencer. The group consists of Fred “Too Slim” LaBour, Woody Paul, and Douglas B. Green, author of numerous articles and books on country and western music. Recently they have made a number of guest appearances on the Grand Ole Opry, released two albums and are enjoying a great deal of acclaim and popularity.

“Cowboy Song,” written by the group’s fiddler, Woody Paul, is a model for western songs; not only does Paul evoke the coyotes, prairies, Texas, the moon, western skies, horses, buffaloes and women, but he offers his six-gun, his saddle, spurs, roping and steerwrestling as well. Nostalgic and sentimental, “Cowboy Song” is an old cowboy’s view of his life. It is performed in classic Sons of the Pioneer style, complete with a whooppee-ti-yi-yo chorus. It shares its nostalgic approach with much of contemporary western-theme music.