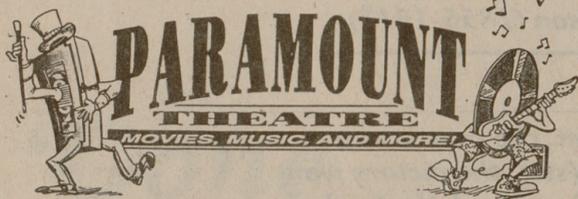


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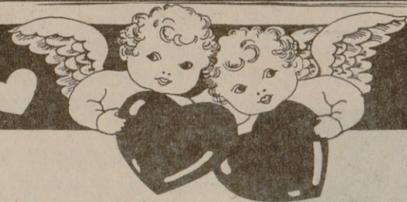
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Patty Loveless, country's latest rising star, to open show

Living legend Strait returns to G. Rollie

By JOHN RIGHTER and
TODD STONE
Of The Battalion Staff

George Strait needs no introduc-
tion to country music fans.

Friday night, the two-time Coun-
try Music Association Male Vocalist
of the Year will perform at G. Rollie
White Coliseum as a presentation of
MSC Town Hall Concerts.

Opening for Strait and his Ace In
The Hole Band is 1988's Best New
Country Artist, Patty Loveless.

Strait, a Pearsall native known for
his old-fashioned style of Texas
honky-tonk and southern swing,
bested the previous A&M ticket sales
of R.E.M. and Restless Heart, selling
out in a matter of days.

He launched his 11-album career
nine years ago after graduating
from Southwest Texas State Univer-
sity.

Since then Strait has garnered
fame through his trademark croons of
yesteryear country flavor, his
clean-cut good looks and his authen-
tic country lifestyle.

Strait is the real thing. A cowboy
from birth, he owns a ranch, has a
degree in agriculture studies, lists
steer-roping as his favorite hobby
and endorses Tony Lama Boots.

The guy bleeds dust and hay.

As an artist, Strait has found a for-
mula that works and has stuck to it.
He lends little effort to the mecha-
nics of his albums, instead employing
Nashville's best young writers and
most capable producers.

His song style is an indelible mix
of tearful ballads and hokey swings
that cry of traditional giants such as
Bob Wills.

As a performer, he has vaulted
from being a regular on the Texas
night club circuit to the single big-
gest draw in country music.

He is the one artist who has been
able to break down the wall of coun-
try gentility. Strait takes one step
and he is guaranteed to bring down

the house (filled mostly with adoring
women). What pressure.

Loveless, on the other hand, has
had a more difficult climb to her
present position as the latest country
music diva.

A Nashville performer since age
14, she got her first break replacing
Loretta Lynn in The Wilburn Broth-
ers. Marriage and high school side-
tracked her until the mid-80s, when
she reemerged on a singing career.

After her third release for MCA
records, *Honky Tonk Angel*, Love-
less is now at the top of Nashville's
industry on the strength of her num-
ber-one single "Timber, I'm Falling
In Love."

Loveless has just begun a 75-date
tour with Strait. She is also finishing
her fourth album, which will be re-
leased in May.

In a telephone interview Wednes-
day, Loveless spoke of her time with
Strait and her rise in success.

"Touring with George has been
great," she says. "He sells out every-
where, so I know I'll get to perform
in front of a lot of people. I'm very
fortunate to get this exposure."

"The only bad part is that I'm a
loner, and now I don't have time to
be alone. I really enjoy the time I get
to spend at home when we have
breaks."

One of the factors that prompted
Loveless' return to singing was the
rediscovery of the traditional coun-
try style, popularized by performers
such as Strait.

"The return to traditional country
music is great," she says. "It exposes
younger people to the older, great
songs, and returns a style that had
been largely forgotten."

"There is definitely a variety in
country music with people like K.T.
Oslin, Dwight Yoakam and Randy
Travis."

Loveless plans to continue touring
in support of *Honky Tonk Angel*
until she finishes the shows with



Country singer Patty Loveless

Strait. She is then scheduled to em-
bark on a solo tour to promote her
next album.

Still, the exposure with Strait is
tremendous for an artist teetering

on the brink of stardom like Love-
less.

And for A&M, Friday night's per-
formance is an excellent opportunity
to catch country music's hottest act.
But then, you already know that.

House Levelers' antics likely to bring down house

By JOHN RIGHTER
Of The Battalion Staff

"We're opening? Well, then you can expect
undiluted madness for 45 minutes," says bass
player Pete Ficht upon finding out his group,
House Levelers, will not headline this weekend.

"When we play for three hours we tend to
stretch out the drunken buffoonery, but 45 min-
utes calls for a lot of jumping around, spitting
beer, falling over and just having fun," he says.

Saturday night's double bill at the Texas Star
Tavern features an interesting live pairing.
Opening for Austin's Vanguards, a veteran
blues-rockabilly band, New Orleans' House Lev-
elers are from a slightly different spectrum.

Unlike the seasoned Vanguards, a classic hard-
working band that has paid its dues and finally is
getting recognition, the House Levelers have
stumbled to their current position.

A three-piece band composed of Ficht, guitar-
ist Grayson Capps and drummer Sterling Roig,
the band bases its sound on Capps' amped acous-
tic guitar and Roig's stripped-to-the-basics drum
kit. The result is an original brand of thrash-folk.

"We're not instrument-based," Ficht explains.
"There is rarely a second when one of us is not
singing. We have to play short, compact songs
'cause Grayson and I aren't good enough musi-
cians to do a worthwhile solo."

"It definitely makes our music different from
most other groups and places the emphasis on
our lyrics, where it should be."

Their lack of musical ability has not fazed the

trio. In fact, the band has capitalized on it.
Instead of the usual mastering of cover songs,
Ficht and Capps began by writing their own
songs.

"Grayson and I started writing our songs be-
cause we couldn't play any covers," Ficht says.
"We didn't know how to. We took the opposite
route of doing songs since we weren't good
enough to learn other band's stuff and instead
focused on creating our own material."

Playing their musical ignorance to the hilt, the
band first performed with a percussionist who
played the pink flamingo.

That's right, the House Levelers hold the dis-
tinction of being the first band to feature a drum-
mer who whacked a way at a set of Lone Star beer
bottles and a tambourine with a pink flamingo.
Somewhere, Neil Peart is experiencing heart fail-
ure.

"The fans loved this idea of a guy drumming
on a stack of beer bottles with this stupid-looking
pink flamingo," Ficht says. "It was really crazy
that some band would do this. They liked him
(original flamingo player Jay Scully) more than
Grayson and I."

Obviously, the band enjoys live performances.
Capps believes that fact sets House Levelers
apart from other bands.

"Playing live is what the House Levelers are all
about," he says. "Our stripped-down sound
comes off as simple, but powerful. It's real music
the audience can relate to."

"Plus, I feel the audience relates to us as peo-
ple and performers. When we screw up we don't

try to hide it, but instead play off it. I think
the audience appreciates that."

Capps and Ficht claim that much "drunken
buffoonery" and hearty laughter is in store for
those at the Tavern this weekend. I wonder if
professional-minded Hugh Stearns (a Texas Star
Tavern owner, who prefers seasoned bands
knows what he has gotten himself into.

Unfortunately, the following tale of how the
name House Levelers came about (and how it
was originally Cliff Fauver House Levelers) won't
ease Stearns' stomach.

"Grayson found this hat in Alabama that had
this emblem with 'Cliff Fauver's House Levelers
Mobile, Alabama' on it," Ficht says. "This idea of
a company that went around and leveled houses
destroyed things for a living, was fantastic and
absurd."

"We thought, 'This is great. We have to name
our band after this guy Cliff.' For a while we in-
vented this Cliff persona that served as our guru.
He was our spiritual leader and our sets featured
songs and stories about Cliff. He became our
symbol."

"We finally dropped the Cliff Fauver part be-
cause our manager was afraid we might get sued
when this guy found out we had hats and t-shirts
with his company's emblem on it."

As an entertainment critic, I shouldn't be al-
lowed to endorse a disaster like the one I think
will occur Saturday night. But somehow, I have a
feeling it will be quite amusing.

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