Twenty-year-old Swede Bjorn Borg overcomes Ilie Nastase to become the youngest tennis player in 45 years to win Wimbledon.

4 America celebrates its Bicentennial in grand style: 225 masted ships from 30 countries cruise through New York Harbor; Washington, DC, sets off 33 1/2 tons of fireworks near the Lincoln Memorial as its new National Air and Space Museum opens; 1,776 new citizens pledge allegiance for the first time in Chicago; and President Ford rings the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia.

The Ramones perform a Bicentennial concert at London's Roundhouse. Two days later, the Damned will debut, opening for the Sex Pistols at London's 100 Club.

12 In New York City, Congresswoman Barbara Jordan (D-TX) becomes the first black person and the first woman to deliver the keynote address at the Democratic National Convention. Three days later, Carter will accept the nomination and select Senator Walter Mondale (D-MN) as his running mate.

17 The XXI Summer Olympics open in Montreal under a political cloud as Taiwan withdraws over the International Olympic Committee's insistence that they not use the name "China," and Tanzania leads a boycott in protest of New Zealand's continued rugby competitions with South Africa. Thirty-two nations decline to participate and six Eastern European athletes will defect before the games close two weeks later. New gold-winning stars include Romanian gymnast Nadia Comaneci, American decathlete Bruce Jenner and Finnish runner Lasse Viren (although Viren is suspected of taking illegal medication).

20 *Viking 1* lands on Mars and begins transmitting the first photographs and weather reports from the planet. On Aug. 7, NASA scientists prematurely release a report suggesting the possibility of Martian life; a later review reveals the *Viking* tests were inconclusive.

21 An unidentified bacterial outbreak strikes a Legionnaires convention in Philadelphia, infecting 180 across the state and eventually killing 29. By Jan. 1977, the Centers for Disease Control identify a new bacterium responsible for the

leading country to rebellion
by chet flippo

REVOLUTION and counterrevolution may seem to be the most unlikely topics ever to be associated with country music, but the tendency to rebel is ingrained in humans, it seems, and it certainly is embedded in the persons most likely to be prominent in country music: white, Southern males of modest education, little or no formal music training, considerable ego and virtually no sense of an enduring musical tradition.

It's not often that one movement can coalesce around one event, but, conveniently, the whole "Outlaw" upheaval in country music came to define itself by the release of one record album.

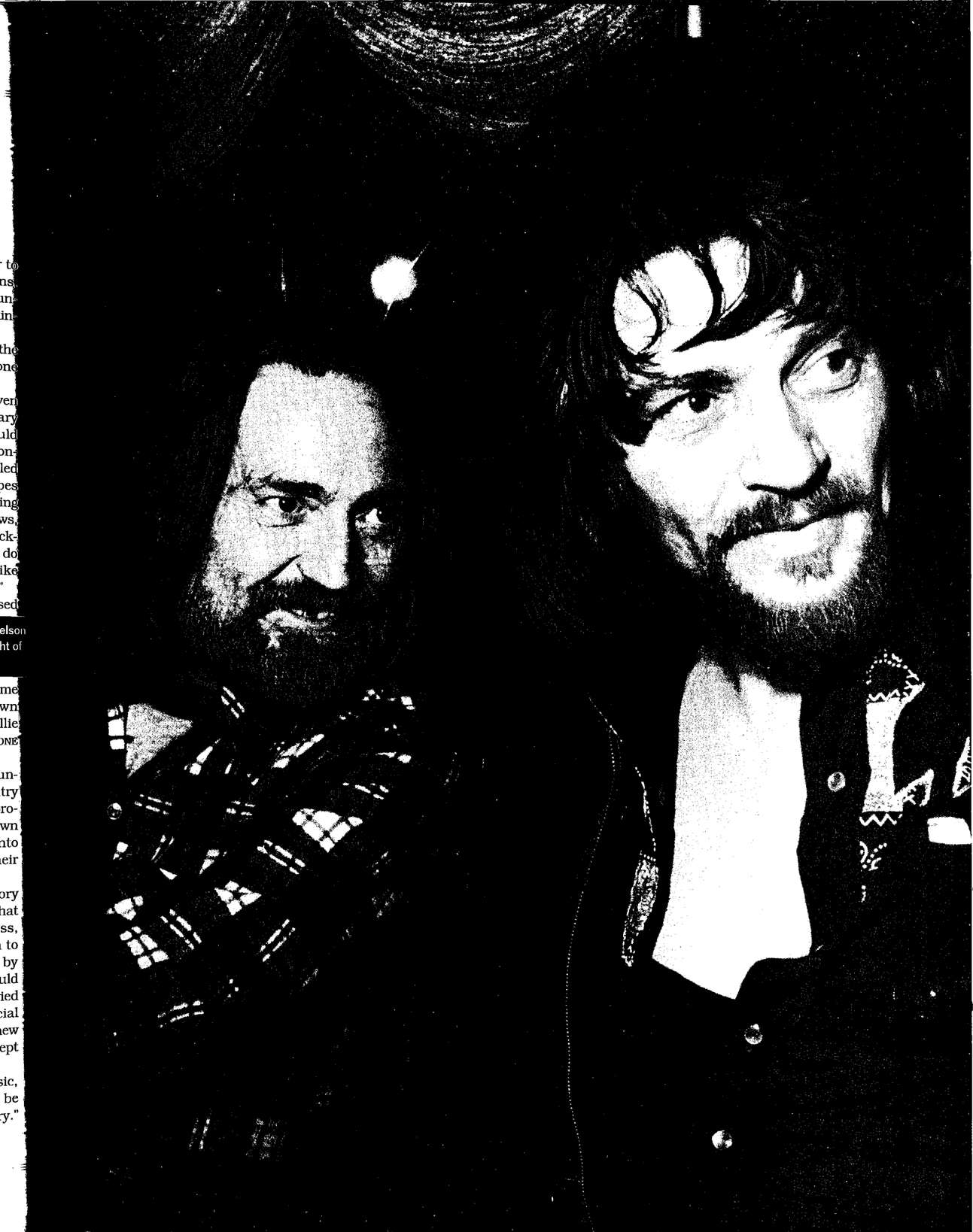
The album – *Wanted! The Outlaws* – itself was not really anything spectacular, even by modest Nashville standards. RCA producer Jerry Bradley (the son of legendary C&W producer Owen Bradley) conceded that, but knew he had hit upon what could become the biggest marketing coup of his life. For once, Nashville was selling a concept rather than just peddling records. Bradley, in fact, said just that when he called me in 1975 to ask me to write liner notes for the *Outlaws* album. "I'll send you tapes on it," he told me, "but I'll bet you've heard most of it before. What I'm doing is putting Willie and Waylon and Tompall [with Waylon's wife, Jessi Colter] together as the Outlaws, because that's the way they are regarded here in town. This is a package, a total package that I'm looking to break outside the country market. That's why I'd like you to do the notes: You know the music and the musicians, but you're not a cheerleader like the writers here in town. You're definitely not considered part of the establishment."

Outlaws was released on January 12, 1976, amid great hoopla by RCA. It soon crossed over to the pop charts, was certified gold by the beginning of April and became country's first platinum-selling album by December. Country music was no longer just a singles market; it now was an album market and thus could rival the sales of rock releases. Willie and Waylon virtually became household names. Their albums began selling gold (500,000 copies) on their own strengths. They were invited to the White House by President Carter in 1978 (Willie and Jessi went; Waylon declined). Their names appeared more often in ROLLING STONE than in *Music City News*.

By the time it ran its course, the Outlaw movement had changed the face of country music forever. The producer as king – that feudal notion was shattered. Country artists gained control over their own record sessions, their own booking, their record production, everything else related to their careers, including the right to make their own mistakes. It was a major shift in country music. It also brought country artists into the million-dollar stratosphere of pop and rock artists and also, of course, into their cocaine-and-marijuana-laced decadence.

Without going into great detail, even a casual reading of country music's history shows a cyclical pattern of action and reaction, based on commercial factors – on what the Nashville movers and shakers thought would sell. As a conservative business, country music may safely be said to have always preferred to follow, rather than to anticipate, trends. Rockabilly is a classic example. It was imposed upon Nashville by outside influences – from just down the road, in Memphis, at Sun Records – and could not be ignored after Elvis Presley's success. The country-music industry initially tried to ignore it and keep selling honky-tonk music, deliberately disregarding the social forces behind the changes in musical tastes. But there was such a groundswell for the new music – particularly by artists – it became clear that it was a future that could not be swept away. RCA farsightedly signed Elvis and thereby guaranteed its commercial future.

As rockabilly waned and – not coincidentally – country moved closer to pop music, Owen Bradley and guitarist and producer Chet Atkins brought forth what came to be known as the Nashville Sound. In another age, it might have been called "Lite Country."



Leaders of the rebellion: Willie Nelson and Waylon Jennings at the height of their Nashville days *(from left)*

so-called Legionnaires' Disease.

27 Seeking to invalidate a contract that he finds creatively and financially stifling, Bruce Springsteen sues his manager, Mike Appel.

John Lennon receives green card #A17-597-321, making his U.S. residency official.

31 Top of the charts: the Manhattans' "Kiss and Say Goodbye" (pop single); George Benson's *Breezin'* (pop album).

1976 AUGUST

1 A Gallup Poll reveals that Carter leads both Ford and Reagan by substantial margins.

10 Elton John begins a seven-show stand at Madison Square Garden that will break a box-office record set the previous summer by the Rolling Stones.

13 British punk rockers the Clash give a private performance for the press and friends, unveiling their influential lineup: singer/guitarist Joe Strummer, guitarist Mick Jones, bassist Paul Simonon and drummer Terry "Tory" Crimes. Guitarist Keith Levene (later of Public Image Ltd.) also performs as part of the band, but departs soon after the show.

New wave/power pop songwriter and bassist Nick Lowe releases his first U.K. single on Stiff Records, the two-sided hit "So It Goes/Heart of the City."

16 The Republican National Convention opens in Kansas City with Ford and Reagan battling for delegates. Two days later, Ford will secure the nomination and select conservative senator Bob Dole (R-KS) as his running mate soon after.

19 Carter solidifies his music industry connections at Capricorn Records' annual picnic in Macon, GA.

23 In a *New York* magazine feature, journalist Tom Wolfe dubs the overly self-involved Seventies "the 'Me' Decade."

24 American Legion conventioneers boo Carter as he announces his plan to grant amnesty to Vietnam War draft resisters. The next day, he will lead a Gallup Poll with 49% of the vote, versus 39% for Ford and 12% undecided.

26 ROLLING STONE reports that 250,000 fans have caught Texas boogie band ZZ Top one month into an 18-month world tour that packs a 75-ton

The producer was truly king with the Nashville Sound in operation. He chose the songs, the pickers, the arrangements, the album cover, the strings and the vocal backing used to "sweeten" the whole package. The singer was almost an afterthought.

It was into this pop-country quagmire that a generation of young country singer/songwriters, such as Willie Nelson and Waylon Jennings, came in the Sixties. Nashville had tried to ignore the Beatles and all they represented – the whole youth culture, pop culture, counterculture. Country music seemed fixed in a death frieze, epitomized by the Grand Ole Opry and its aging, rural, loyal-to-Roy Acuff audience on the one hand, and the younger, moved-to-the-city blue-collar crowd on the other. Audiences were no longer isolated or segregated: Even in rural areas, younger people listened to the latest Top Forty pop and rock hits, and, as they did so, they began to ask more of country music.

By the early Seventies there came to be a broad-based revolution spawned by the non–power brokers – the writers and singers – that was as much influenced by the Beatles as by Bob Dylan, as much by the Vietnam War as by country star Johnny Cash (who had been a one-man phenomenon).

The term "Outlaw" had surfaced with Waylon's 1972 hit song and album of the same name, "Ladies Love Outlaws." The song, written by Lee Clayton, one of the junior Outlaws in Waylon's orbit, was intended to be, Clayton said, more or less tongue-in-cheek. But it quickly caught on as a sort of anthem.

As far as the Outlaw business being a genuine rebellion against Nashville, it was a true declaration of independence by those involved. Willie had never been served well by the Nashville system and simply wanted to be left alone to pursue his musical vision. If he had to go to Texas to do so, so be it. (Ironically, a year before *The Outlaws* was released, Willie went down to a little studio in Garland, Texas, with his band and recorded his true breakthrough album, *Red Headed Stranger*. When CBS Records' Billy Sherrill balked at releasing the sparsely arranged record, Willie won the test of wills.) Waylon had felt ill-served by the system for years, and rightly so. He mainly wanted a little freedom: to record with his road band and to record what songs he wanted to, when he wanted to – without a producer who had been assigned by Atkins – and especially where he wanted to.

It was this last wish that led to his alignment with Tompall Glaser and the formation of Outlaw Headquarters at Hillbilly Central, Tompall's studio on Nineteenth Avenue South in Nashville. And in 1972, after discovering that RCA had not automatically picked up Waylon's option to re-sign with the company, his manager soon had Columbia, Atlantic, Capitol and Mercury wooing Waylon. After tense negotiations, RCA eventually re-signed Waylon, but gave him the greatest artistic freedom of any of its country artists.

His music didn't change immediately, but his records did – especially the 1973 album that became the quintessential Outlaw work: *Honky Tonk Heroes*. It also set the formula for what became known as Outlaw music: sparsely accompanied and highly personal songs – a cowboy's diary set to a driving beat, as it were. This was Waylon Jennings working at full bore, finally able to do what he wanted to, capturing his lusty, gritty vision. Nine of the ten songs on *Honky Tonk Heroes* were written by another Texas Outlaw, Billy Joe Shaver, a gifted poet who was determined to try Nashville because of his idols, Willie and Waylon. Billy Joe hitchhiked to Nashville on the back of a truck loaded with cantaloupes, naive in his belief that such songs as "Black Rose" – about a black-white romance – could make it in Nashville. They did, although they could not have five years earlier or five years later. The Outlaw window was open, however briefly. Even though the credits say the album *Honky Tonk Heroes* was recorded at RCA, the bulk of it was cut at Hillbilly Central, with Waylon and Tompall producing.

The astonishing thing was that, until Waylon in particular began to receive exposure in the rock press and success with rock audiences and became aware of how things were done in rock, the Outlaws – as well as most artists in Nashville – didn't realize that having artistic freedom in the recording studio was a given outside Nashville. You could record what you wanted and record it with your road band, you could pick the cover of your album, you could try to find a booking agent capable of putting you into places better than the blood-and-guts honky-tonks. You could pick a manager from Los Angeles or New York or anywhere else, and it could be someone who wasn't part of the tiny Nashville old-boy network. And – the biggest heresy – you could control your own pub-

lishing, which of course was always where the real money was and had always been Nashville's darkest little secret.

In short, that was the crux of the Outlaw movement: It had nothing to do with long hair or wearing black leather or smoking dope or any other trivial sideshow issues. It was actually a fairly sober attempt at gaining self-determination and independence – not such a rare thing for creative people to seek. I can remember being touched by what I considered Waylon's naiveté when – after he started opening for such rock bands as the Grateful Dead – he was flabbergasted to learn that such groups could actually put riders into their contracts calling for specific food and drink to be served to them in their dressing room. It was almost like watching a barefoot kid discover shoes.

What they did not yet have to effectuate real change in the Nashville music hierarchy was big record sales. Sales, anywhere in the music business, equaled money, and money equaled power. Getting music writers from ROLLING STONE to rave about an Outlaw concert was one thing, but moving those albums out of the stores – that was the kicker, that would certify whether or not this little "movement" that Nashville seemed to have on its hands would amount to anything more than a temper tantrum being thrown by some talented, if immature, youngsters who had not yet learned the tribal ways. Jerry Bradley knew that. He knew, he thought, just how to fix all that with his big Concept Album.

They talk about progressive country, but it's really progressive listeners – *Willie Nelson*

Wanted! The Outlaws had only Waylon's name on the spine (because he was the only one of the four Outlaws under contract to RCA at the time). Jerry Bradley decreed that there be a burnt-at-the-edges wanted-poster look to the cover of the thing, with Waylon's picture front and center, to be flanked by Willie, Tompall and Jessi, with my liner notes on the back, in the form of a poster or broadside. The cuts on the record were unremarkable. Side one was made up of Waylon's "My Heroes Have Always Been Cowboys" and "Honky Tonk Heroes," Jessi's "I'm Looking for Blue Eyes" and "You Mean to Say," and "Suspicious Minds" by Waylon and Jessi. Side two opened with Willie and Waylon singing "Good Hearted Woman" and "Heaven or Hell" and Willie's rendition of "Me and Paul" and "Yesterday's Wine." It ended with Tompall's "T for Texas" and "Put Another Log on the Fire." Not exactly a song lineup to draw the angels' hosannas. Yet this *Outlaws* album was the first platinum album in country-music history. There have been many answers advanced to explain that and, I suspect, the most nearly correct one is that the timing of the album was perfect. Two spectacular albums from 1975 – Willie's *Red Headed Stranger* and Waylon's *Dreaming My Dreams* – primed the Outlaw audience. Had it been released six months earlier or six months later, its impact might have been negligible. As it was, its fallout was considerable.

Outlaw-clone music inundated Nashville, and Willie and Waylon clones flooded the South and Southwest. In Texas, particularly, the Outlaw look became an everyday uniform, and that led right into the "Texas Chic" trend, which itself directly spawned the whole *Urban Cowboy* business. Willie and Waylon soon declared themselves sick of the Outlaw moniker, but they were more or less stuck with it. In 1978, Waylon felt moved to write and record the song "Don't You Think This Outlaw Bit's Done Got Out of Hand," and he doesn't write all that much.

The excesses performed in the name of Outlaw, by musicians and fans alike, were legion. A backlash was inevitable, especially after other performers began to see the amount of success (and money) that accrued to Willie and Waylon. Their records and concerts were scrutinized and criticized to a degree neither had thought possible.

Oddly, what may have been the biggest legacy of the Outlaws was scarcely recognized. In effectively challenging and then shattering Nashville's feudal system, the Outlaw movement opened the doors of artistic freedom wide – perhaps a shade too wide for some. Country music (and its new pop audience and attendant prosperity) not only had made room for a Joe Ely or a Rosanne Cash or a Ricky Skaggs, it also had made room (too much, some said) for crossover crooners like Kenny Rogers.

Nowadays, the Outlaw movement has proved itself a durable building block in the ongoing construction of the country-music edifice. Artistic freedom may well be its most lasting legacy – Garth Brooks could likely never have leveraged his degree of independence without the lasting lesson of Willie, Waylon, et al. to draw upon. Steve Earle perhaps would not have started his own record label – E-Squared – on Music Row in Nashville, in the very heart of the Country Establishment, without a maverick tradition as inspiration. The Mavericks themselves would probably still be outside the walls of Nashville, shouting to be let in, had it not been for these earlier rebels chipping away at those walls. Of course, it still all comes down to economics – an outlaw outfit selling a few records is ignored; an outlaw outfit selling platinum is not an outlaw gang, it's a successful, respected business entity.