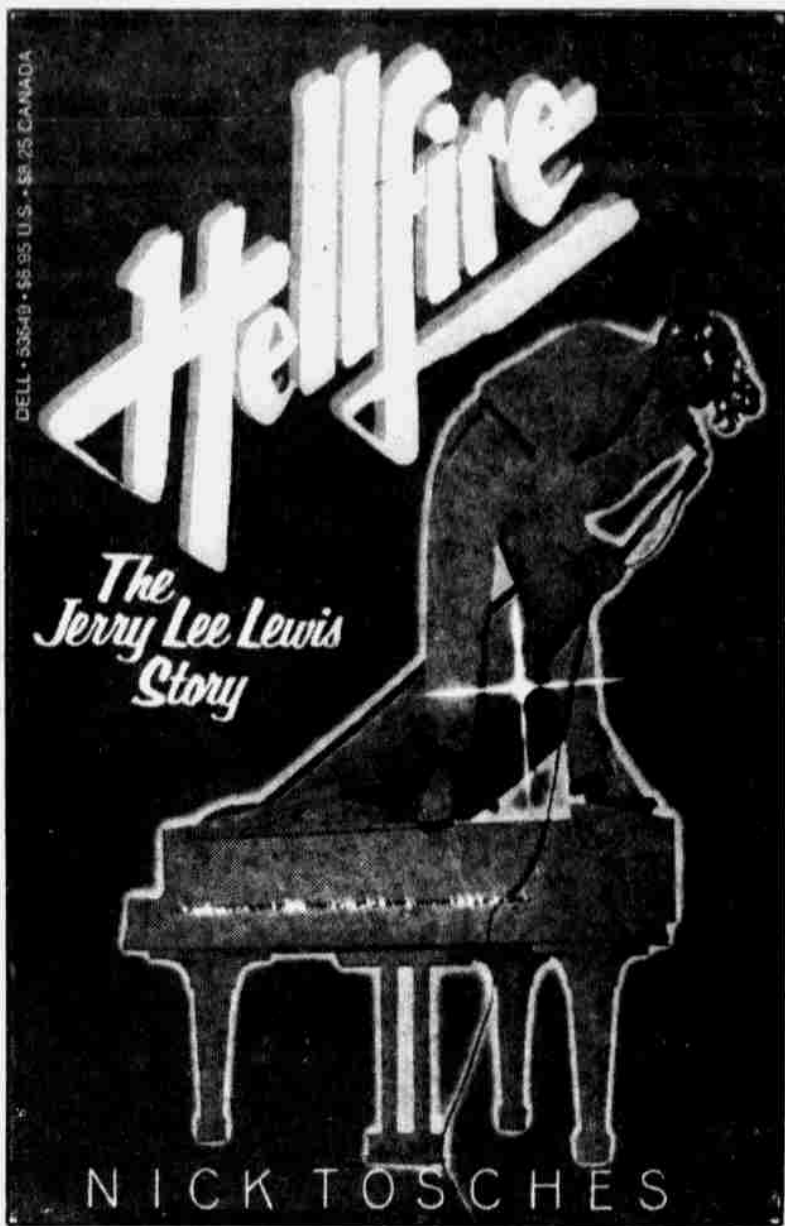


# Arts & Entertainment



By Pat Higgins

*Hellfire — The Jerry Lee Lewis Story*/Nick Tosches/  
Dell Publishing Company

"Jerry Lee Lewis is the heart of redneck rock and roll and maybe the greatest country singer alive. Talk about rock and roll depravados: Jerry Lee makes them look like Wayne Newton. Talk about honky-tonk heroes; next to Jerry Lee they're a bunch of frat-party pukers."

—Nick Tosches

*Hellfire* is the definitive biography of Jerry Lee Lewis and one of the best books about rock'n'roll yet written. Tosches has a great story and he makes the most of it as he captures the explosive music and lifestyle of the Killer and does it with a great deal of flair and style.

"Interviewing Jerry Lee Lewis is a lot like dealing with a wild animal except Jerry Lee can talk," said biographer Nick Tosches in a *Daily Nebraskan* phone interview. Tosches wrote for *Rolling Stone* back when that meant something and now contributes to *Penthouse* among other periodicals. He also wrote *Country: The Biggest Music in America*, a brilliant, irreverent history of country which featured a crazed section on Jerry Lee.

"I've always enjoyed his demonic persona and music," he said. "He always struck me as someone who was firmly rooted in the hills. I think he'll make great music to the day that he dies."

Elvis and Jerry Lee ruled the rock'n'roll world of the mid-'50s. They are the only two artists to have simultaneous number one hits on the pop, country, and rhythm and blues charts. Elvis was the good boy who went in to

## Flutist to perform

Flutist William Bennett will perform at Kimball Recital Hall March 17, at 8 p.m.

Bennett began his artistic career at an early age and thought seriously of becoming a painter. He began playing the flute at the age of 12, studying with Geoffrey Gilbert, the first English flutist to embrace the French style of flute playing. Bennett continued studying with Gilbert through his years at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and his three year's service in the Scots Guards Band. After this he went to Paris, studying with Rampal and Cartatge as a result of winning a French Government Scholarship. At 22, he won first medal in the Geneva Flute Competition.

Bennett's ability to translate his musical ideas into verbal concepts has long been appreciated. He was a professor at Guildhall School, from 1967 until 1976. He was then selected to succeed his mentor, Marcel Moyse, as the teacher of flute for the masterclasses at the International Summerschool, a position he still holds. He gives masterclasses in the United States every summer at Wildacres in North Carolina and at Asilomar in California. He also has given masterclasses in England, Scotland, Norway, Italy and Canada.

Bennett's principal positions have included the BBC Northern Orchestra in Manchester, Sadler Wells, London Symphony and the Royal Philharmonic. In 1976 he made the decision to pursue a solo career, giving up his post with the London Symphony. He now plays with the English Chamber Orchestra and the Academy of Saint Martin-in-the-Friends, with which he has recorded extensively. His work with these orchestras allows him more time for solo engagements and the playing of chamber music.

## Jerry Lee Lewis's biography wild, insightful rock reading with flair

the army and subsequently became the definitive pop icon.

### Rock'n'roll creation

"I think Jerry Lee has always been jealous of Elvis' success and fame," Tosches said. "I did steal a good anecdote from Elvis' hairdresser that I put in the book."

The most fascinating sections of *Hellfire* deal with the creation of rock'n'roll at the Sun Studios in Memphis. Tosches has tapes which he prints verbatim of conversations between Jerry Lee, Carl Perkins and the other demented Southern boys who put country into wedlock with rhythm and blues. Jerry Lee fell from popular grace when he married his 13-year-old cousin in 1957.

"Myra Gale (the cousin) is thinking about marrying Jerry Lee for the third time," he said. "She wouldn't talk to me because she is writing her own book."

Tosches' extensive research on the Lewis clan (which includes cousins Mickey Gilley and evangelist Reverend Jimmy Lee Swaggart) traced back to the original Lewis to immigrate to the United States in 1790 and found that they have always been wild and particularly fond of gambling and drinking. Jerry Lee is the last of the Lewises and he more than upholds the family tradition.

"Jerry Lee is in favor of any means of excess," he said. When I went in to interview him I brought some beer. He was already drinking Seagrams 7 but he demanded my beer."

In *Hellfire*, Jerry Lee is shown as a creature of great talent and many contradictions. He had fundamentalist religion drilled into him which caused guilt about playing the devil's music, i.e. rock'n'roll. Yet he also is willing to use pills and booze constantly while continually invoking the Holy Ghost.

### Guilt over music

"Periodically he finds Jesus but he really believes that he is playing the devil's music," Tosches said. "His cousin the Reverend Jimmy Swaggart says that he doesn't believe in exorcism except for Jerry Lee. Mickey Gilley told me that with Jerry Lee there is a fine line between a genius and an idiot," Tosches said.

Jerry Lee is quite open and unabashed in interviews with Tosches. This is perhaps due to the fact that Jerry Lee has an ego the size of the Grand Canyon. Particularly amusing are conversations with Elmo Lewis, Jerry Lee's father.

"Elmo was a great old guy," Tosches said. "He really could drink. Jerry Lee is quite open about everything. His doctors have told him that he has to give up liquor and drugs. The effects of his excesses are starting to show. The last time I saw him he was making long dream-like speeches about pizza and Nat King Cole."

Jerry Lee has been ill recently and there were premature reports of his demise. Yet he has been released from the hospital.

### Dwells on death

"I had three phone calls asking me to write his obituary which showed a lot of class by those people," Tosches said. "He is obsessed with death and the Holy Ghost. One of the first things he asked me was where I was planning on being buried. I told him North Carolina,

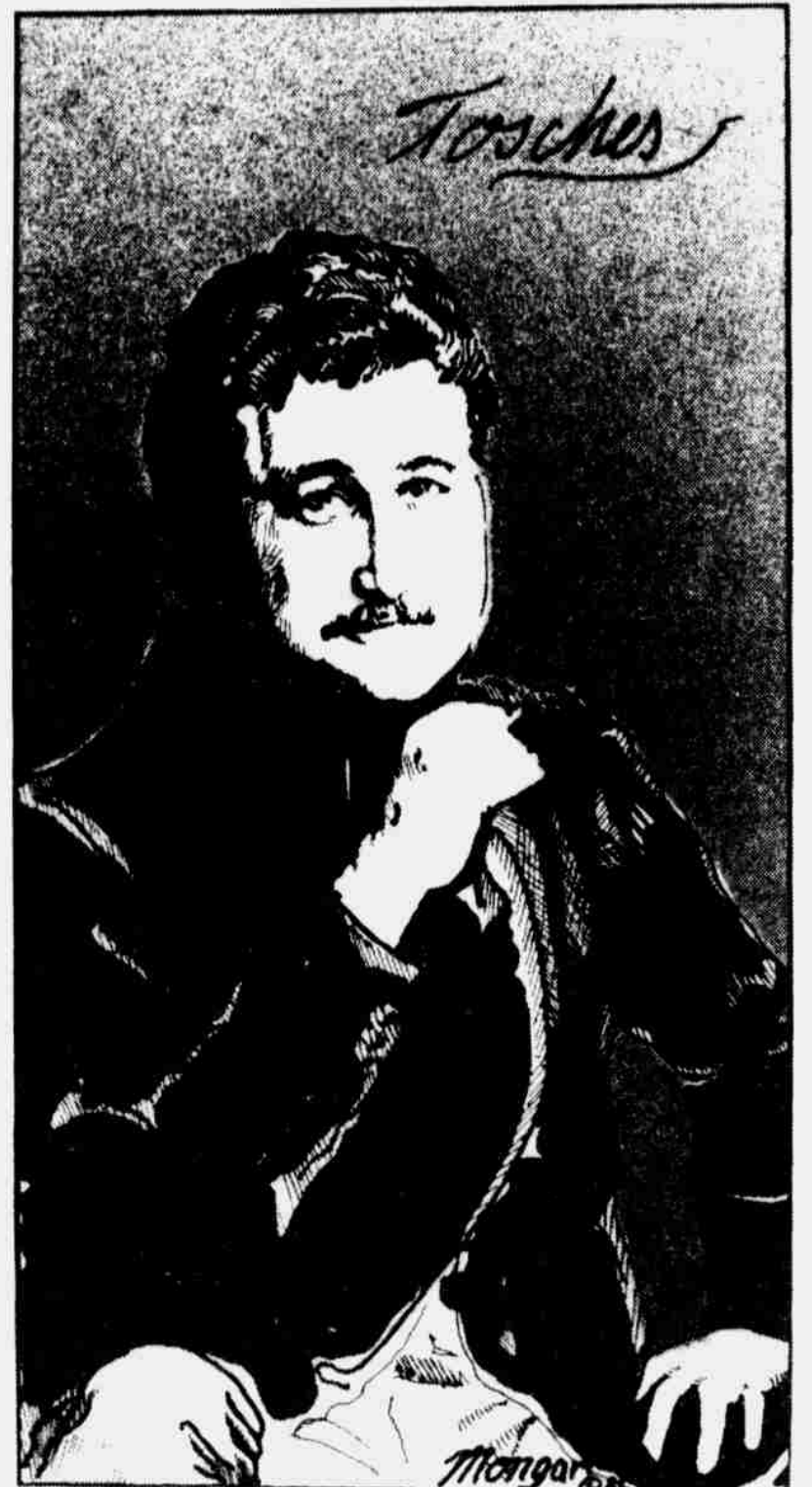
which satisfied him."

Jerry Lee is the quintessential American outlaw as he combines women, fast cars and guns to create a personal style that is completely outrageous. However, the key point that Tosches makes is that it is the Killer's music which will endure.

"I was immersed in writing this for two years of my life," Tosches said. "I originally was just going to do a quick, hack type of effort but my editor fell in love with the book. I found myself writing a Southern Gothic novel, only the people were real."

Jerry Lee is in heavy debt and Elektra Record company has dropped him, Tosches said. However, a live album recorded with Carl Perkins and Johnny Cash in Germany will be out soon.

"The last I heard from Jerry Lee was when he told a photographer friend of mine that he was going to have me killed," Tosches said. "Jerry Lee has never been one to use legal recourse."



## Belushi: Gave greatest gift of all

*The Compleat Student's Guide to the Campus and Beyond*. Chapter Two: "What To Do When Your Marijuana Plants Develop Spider Mites."

MR. WIZARD: Well, hi there, Tommy. My, you look down in the mouth today. What's the matter? Couldn't you find out what to do about spider mites on



**Chuck Jagoda**

marijuana plants?

TOMMY: Yeah, I did that Mr. Wizard. I called the Entomology Department and they told me I could use alcohol on the underside of the leaves.

MR. WIZARD: Of marijuana plants?

TOMMY: I didn't tell them that. I just said house plants. The reason I'm down in the mouth is because John Belushi died. I'm afraid it might be a trend.

MR. WIZARD: A trend, Tommy?

TOMMY: Yeah. Like Richard Pryor the summer before last. Remember when he burned himself up free-basing cocaine?

MR. WIZARD: Yes I do, Tommy.

TOMMY: Well maybe the comedians are the overdoses of the '80s decade the way the rock stars were in the '70s.

MR. WIZARD: That's very interesting, Tommy. You mean like Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix and Jim Morrison?

TOMMY: Saay Mr. Wizard, you do listen to other

things besides that dull classical stuff.

MR. WIZARD: We have to listen to all the voices in our environment to know its culture, Tommy.

TOMMY: I know, Mr. Wizard. That's what you always say.

MR. WIZARD: Where did you get this idea about the overdose trend in the first place?

TOMMY: Well, last month was the 23rd anniversary of the plane crash that killed Buddy Holly, the Big Bopper and Richie Valens, and I started thinking how they all died in the crash and how rock stars died from overdoses, and I wondered if there was any connection. And now they say that they found needle marks on Belushi's arms. What do you think it all means Mr. W?

MR. WIZARD: Well, for one thing, comedians must be making enough money to kill themselves as expensively as rock stars. Secondly all those physical abuses and emotional extremes John Belushi displayed so believably on *Saturday Night Live* and in *Animal House* were part of his personality and thirdly, it lends a certain air of authenticity to those skits he and Bill Murray used to do where they were backstage with the rock stars and everybody was doing "tootski." They were getting their material from experience with the rock as well as the stars.

TOMMY: What are you saying, Mr. Wizard?!

MR. WIZARD: I'm saying that performing is a perfect opportunity — in fact performance even *requires* you — to open the floodgates of your emotion, to go as far as you can in an emotional or behavioral direction. The type of people who are drawn to performing are those who

Continued on Page 13