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Johnny 99 and White Shoes: Country music in flux.

Music takes many directions in review of country albums

By Mike Frost

Could it be? Today is the first day of December, and we've yet to feature a single country music album review. An abysmal circumstance, to be sure, because country music is currently in a greater state of flux than it has been for 30 years.

Indeed, the '80s could very well prove to be the first time since the '50s that country music comes to grip with

sover artists who for years have slicked down their music with pop affectations and grandiose orchestral arrangements. At the same time, the emergence of "New Music" made it less possible for these artists to chart a record on the pop side. These are musical orphans, looking for a new home. Hence, the flux.

Keeping this in mind, here is a quick look at several new releases that indicate the many directions country music is heading in search of its identity.

Bobby Bare, *Drinkin' From the Bottle, Singin' From the Heart* (Columbia) — If seventies culture can be described as laid back, then Bobby Bare's music over the past five years also can be given that label. Here, Bare attempts another album of Shel Silverstein songs, most of them done at an easy tempo, all of them celebrating the virtues of kickin' off your shoes and having a good ol' time. Good for a song or two ("The Jogger" made for an enjoyable single) but it gets tiring over the course of an entire album.

Jimmy Buffett, *One Particular Harbour* (MCA) — Buffett is one of those crossover artists of yesteryear who have yet to find a niche in the current marketplace. His drunker-than-thou songs of the sea were occasionally quite philosophical in the past, but here he's just sort of going through the motions. Better take out *Son of a Son of a Sailor* and forget about *One Particular Harbour*.

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its identity. Country music in the '50s was marked by a distinctive sound that clearly defined its musical boundaries. There was no middle ground; either you liked country music or you didn't.

That lack of middle ground was the chief factor for the low volume business country music did. For the next 30 years, country music would attempt to make itself more appealing to a larger market. The countrypolitan, country-rock and urban cowboy movements did result in higher sales. At the same time, however, it alienated a large number of country loyalists who were dissatisfied with the "new" country sound.

These were the Ricky Skaggses and the John Andersons who now dominate the country charts. Their pure sounds are an alien thing to the cross-

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