

AMERICA'S NUMBER ONE COUNTRY PUBLICATION

July, 1978 - \$1.25

COUNTRY MUSIC

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Look Out
Loretta...
Step Aside
Tammy...

**CRYSTAL
GAYLE**

Is The
Woman Of
The Hour

**PORTER
WAGONER**
Tells All!

No Broken
Hearts For
**MARGO
SMITH**

**ZELLA
LEHR**
One-Ups
Miss Dolly

**SPECIAL SECTION:
The Ears Have It**





Are we ready for just a good singer?

Just CRYSTAL

by MICHAEL BANE

Ill omens and bad feelings, a nagging sense of impending doom and arriving for my lunch with Crystal Gayle a full 15 minutes too early. No reservations and snotty uptown waiters.

Crystal *who?*

United *what* Records?

Wait *quietly* at the bar, and try to keep out from underfoot, if you please.

Bad karma, if you will. We are all seated, Crystal and her entourage and I. She is beautiful, a perfect miniature of a full-sized person crafted by someone with an eye for detail. There is a persistent tapping on my shoulder.

"Excuse me, sir."

It is the waiter, looking like a poorly dressed extra from a Vincent Price movie.

"Excuse me, sir, if you don't have a jacket, we'll have to ask you to leave."

I don't, as is fairly obvious, have a jacket. Crystal collapses in a fit of uncontrollable giggles.

"Would you, perhaps, like us to bring you a jacket?"

Oh, I say, mustering whatever couth I can muster on short notice, by all means. Please *do* bring me your latest in designer originals. Crystal has managed to throttle her giggles down to controlled snickers. I receive my frayed benediction from the Vincent Price extra, extending my most sincere compliments to the tailor and try desperately to remember what I'm doing here.

"Did you hear me on the radio?" Crystal asks, quickly filling a void between the giggles and the salad. "Being a guest deejay (on WHN, New York City's country station)?"

As a matter of fact, I say, I did. And then I giggle—it's catching, I suppose.

"Oh my God," says Crystal's road manager. "He's laughing!"

I'm sorry, I say, still giggling.

"Okay," says Crystal Gayle. "You're really getting off on the wrong foot."

"I thought you did an excellent job on the radio..."

Crystal at New York's Bottom Line...





—and that school of thought holds that one should hang on every word; that each little nugget of thought is a diamond in the rough, to be carved and polished and carefully placed in an expensive journalistic setting, where all the rest of us can file by and reverently look under the glass.

—“Tell us, Crystal, what do you think about the continuing political crisis in Rhodesia?”

—“Tell us, Crystal, do you really see your big sister as the transcendental expression of lower-middle-class *angst*, that to understand the political ramifications of *The Pill* is to understand the central dilemma of working women in America today?”

—Tell us, Crystal, are you sorry you weren't born in Butcher Holler? Can you really be a country girl without being a coal miner's daughter or an ex-beautician or dirt-poor from East Nowhere, Mississippi? Tell us, Crystal, do you ever feel guilty because, well, maybe you didn't suffer *enough*?”

The first time she played New York, at a funky little East Side club called O'Lunney's, an interviewer from somewhere or other came up to her after the set and asked her what the word “love” meant to her.

“He wanted me to give a definition of ‘love,’” she says, still wincing from a question asked in 1973. “I don't remember who, but of course I didn't have an answer. . . I mean, love, you can take so many different ways. . . So that's my answer—you can take it many different ways. . . Love is a word taken many different ways.”

She giggles—something, as you may have gathered, Crystal Gayle does a lot—at the absolute absurdity of defining love over a bowl of Hugh O'Lunney's chili one night.

“Be yourself, Crystal,” says one of Crystal's companions.

“That's what I'm afraid of,” says Crystal Gayle. “He really doesn't want that side of me, does he?”

I was in Nashville recently, I say, and I asked a bunch of people what I should ask Crystal Gayle.

“Don't take this personally,” I say cleverly, “But about six people mentioned that you were a giggler. . .”

“I want their names. . .” Crystal grins.

“Well,” Crystal explodes, “What's wrong with laughing? There was an article in the *LA Times*, and they had in there (something like) ‘in my giggly, childish way.’ Why does life have to go around looking dull and being serious? I mean, there's so many bad things happening in the world, why can't you go around giggling and laughing and having fun? I take things serious when they need to be taken serious. And people know when I'm serious. . .”

“I mean, like we're doing an interview, and you could go and *destroy* me when

“No, you did not. You can't even say that with a straight face. . .”

“I still think you really did a good job. . .”

“Did I giggle?”

“Not much. . .”

“Why don't,” suggests a voice of sanity from across the table, “you talk about your new record, Crystal? Ask her about her new album.”

“My new album?”

“Your new album?”

“Oh, yea.”

. . .

Enough of this levity, this giggling in the face of your basic Grammy and CMA award winner; this torch singer-cum-Loretta Lynn's little sister who sings like a (as they say) slumming angel and giggles like the girl next door. A little respect, *puh-lease*.

There is a whole school of thought about the interviewing of celebrities—and Crystal Gayle is certainly that these days

**FIND OUT WHAT GOES ON BEHIND
THOSE BLUE EYES AS YOU LISTEN
TO THE COLOR OF HER DREAMS.**

*After a number one pop hit, a platinum album, and Grammy and Country Music Association awards for best female singer what's left for Crystal Gayle to dream of?
Just listen to Crystal's first album since "We Must Believe in Magic"
and you'll start believing in Dreams.*

CRYSTAL GAYLE'S "WHEN I DREAM."



Crystal



Produced by Allen Reynolds. On United Artists Records.



you write the interview," she says. "Really. You could really cut me down, and I'm saying I could really just get angry at you or something, but, see, why take that all seriously?"

From the Sunday, April 9, edition of the *New York Times*, titled *Crystal Gayle's (sic) Singing Career Is A Lot More Than Luck*.

"At times, in talking with her, one has lingering doubts about the drive and seriousness she is willing to bring to her career. This is a woman, after all, who can joke cheerily that she does not mind it said that she backed into her success, because "I walk better backward than forward..."

Ah, yes, lingering doubts. Again that strange ambivalence toward our culture heroes, whereby, on the one hand we can hardily condemn Dolly Parton for her calculated, expensive and dreadfully successful assault on the pop charts, while on the other we can tsk-tsk Crystal Gayle for not being serious enough. We'd prefer our heroes, be they singing stars or sex symbols, to be driven, obsessed with the necessity for creation, for making their art. We see—rather, we sense—some purity of spirit behind the plain-dirt roots of a Loretta Lynn that maybe, just maybe, is missing in the squeaky-clean Wabash, Indiana, upbringing of Brenda Gail Webb, christened Crystal by big sister Loretta in honor of a ubiquitous Southern chain of tiny hamburger joints. We want dirt; we

want soul; we want the Real Thing; D-I-V-O-R-C-E, blue-collar lusts and babies.

Are we really ready for just a very good singer?

Crystal Gayle is a very good singer who happens to have impeccable tastes in music. She also happens to have Allen Reynolds, one of the best producers working in music today, as her producer and mentor. The result has been consistently good, consistently well, tasteful music, from *This Is My Year For Mexico* to *Don't It Make My Brown Eyes Blue*, the song that once and for all put Crystal on the musical map. And, perhaps more importantly, they have succeeded without once catering to the "common wisdoms" that keep Nashville resolutely anchored in the 1950s. Production quality, for instance—there are no compromises on Crystal's records, and they stand as the best produced records coming out of Nashville today. A willingness to try new things, to expand into new territory on the heels of success instead of huddling behind a "safe" follow-up record.

"We didn't look for a follow-up (to *Brown Eyes*)," Crystal says. "We looked for songs that we really wanted again. If I'd wanted a follow-up, I'd have released the perfect song off *We Must Believe In Magic*, which I knew would have been a perfect follow-up. But I didn't want to go that route. *I Want To Come Back To You* would have been the perfect follow-up.

But I didn't want to release a song like that. I wanted to come with a single that was more me."

What she and Allen finally decided on was *Ready For The Times To Get Better*, one of Allen's own compositions originally recorded by Marshall Chapman. Nothing could have been further from the torchy *Brown Eyes*—*Ready For The Times To Get Better*, in fact, is something of a departure. The song carries none of the bubbly optimism of Crystal's earlier work, such as *Someone Loves You*, or the love-lost bluey feel of *Brown Eyes*. Rather, *Ready For The Times To Get Better* carries a hard edge, a tough edge: a woman who's had enough and is, quite simply, ready for the times to get better.

Okay, Crystal Gayle, the bottom line is this: you're distressingly normal and you've got tremendous taste, not to mention one hell of a voice. It's hard to pigeonhole a person who doesn't think that the sun rises and sets with next week's chart positions, who resolutely believes, as you seem to, that there's more to life than being tomorrow's superstar. You and Allen do things your own way, and in a city where the conventional wisdom is that, say, if you have a hit with the words "heaven" and "sin" in the title, you should spend the rest of your life recording songs with "heaven" and "sin" in the title, doing things your own way is nothing short of miraculous. Not that it matters, but I approve. ■