

# John Hartford still around

By MARK MAHONEY  
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John Hartford.

You might remember him from *The Glen Campbell Show* a few years back. In the middle of the show Glen would shuck his patent leather shoes and get down to some country pickin' with a long-haired banjo player who wrote the show's theme song, *Gentle on My Mind*.

Well, a few albums and a divorce later, that long-haired banjo player, now 30 years old, is still around — busy on the summer festival circuit. In that capacity, John Hartford graced the Tri-Cities last weekend by headlining Joe "Fank" Leach's Down Home Old Time Music Festival held outside Jonesboro.

Hartford is wary of reporters. After his stint with Campbell, he would rarely grant an interview. This mysterious "era of silence" was begging to be explored. So after convincing the quiet, soft-spoken musician that it was safe to talk with me, my first question was about his silence during the early '70s.

"Look, if there's one thing that will shut me off, it's that," he said. "Now I know you have a job to do, but ... What a start! My big leading question was shot down, leaving both of us with a bad taste in our mouths."

Quickly I sweetened the conversation by asking Hartford about how he became interested in music.

"When I was a kid growing up in St. Louis, I'd listen to the radio constantly ... you know, things like the Grand Ole Opry. So when I was 10 or so, I asked my parents for a banjo. I got one and I listened to all the greats, trying to copy them."

But he it music, painting or whatever, copying does not make an artist. It takes an individual style. Hartford developed his style simply: "When I couldn't copy someone exactly I'd fake it. What was left was style," he laughed.

What was left was a top rate performer and a sensitive, humorous artist.

When on stage Hartford is a one-man band. He plays old-time fiddle and guitar as well as banjo. In addition, while singing and playing, Hartford tap dances his rhythm on an amplified plywood board.

Hartford's music is of an old-time country flavor. But his lyrics are modern, catchy and usually humorous.



Times-News Photo — Mark Mahoney

**'When I couldn't copy someone exactly I'd fake it. What was left was style.'**

He sings of old radio shows and of wars.

He sings of warped records, reggae bands and of his fourth grade teacher who "gave me my disease for steamboats."

When he's not performing or recording, Hartford spends his spare time operating a friend's passenger steamboat. In fact, if you were in Knoxville last April for the Dogwood Festival, and you took a ride on the steamboat, John Hartford was probably on board.

When he talks about working on the boats, there's a faraway look in his eyes — as if he's behind the wheel and reading the river.

"Sometimes I work the ship on the Mississippi for a while until I have to go back to work." He looked bewildered. "That's kind of strange ... having to leave a job to go to work."

Let the buyer beware . . .

by Michael Clark

## It's A Game

Bay City Rollers — Artista

I tried to listen to this with an open mind, but these songs are so insipid, the arrangements are so tired, and the vocals are so uninspired, that I soon dropped the cloak of objectivity and donned my coat of cynical narrowmindedness long enough to write this bitter review. The Beatles my . . . (Fill in your own blank). These guys couldn't carry McCartney's music stand. Needless to say, it's a smash hit album already. Better we should compare them to the Dave Clark Five. . . C minus

## Life On Earth

Artie Traum — Rounder

This is an album for everybody. The pickers should enjoy Artie's easy style. Pop fans will like songs like *First Affair* and *Stranger*. Bluegrass fans already know of Artie and will be happy to see his first solo outing. Don't let the label mislead you, though. This is not a typical Rounder release. It's definitely not another bluegrass album. It's a varied album by a major, though largely ignored, artist. A

## Live At The Old Quarter, Houston, Texas

Townes van Zandt — Tomato

Townes played not too long ago at Down Home, and if you enjoyed that, then this is a must. This two record release, recorded in 1973, is simply Townes and his guitar on songs like *Fraternity Blues*, *Pancho and Lefty*, *Cocaine Blues*, *Kathleen* and a haunting *Brand New Companion*. Townes is a folk, and a dedicated one, and his music is warm and heartfelt, and often very amusing. A strong debut for this label. A

## More Music From Mud Acres: Woodstock Mountains

Various Artists — Rounder

The first *Mud Acres* album featured a then largely unknown Maria Muldaur, Eric Kaz (now of American Flyer fame), the Trauma Brothers (Happy and Artie) and Bill Keith, among others. It contained a wide selection of American classics, such as *Titanic*. This LP continues with artists like Eric Anderson (featured on *Waiting for a Train*), John Sebastian (*Morning Blues* and a wonderful harp rendition of *Amazing Grace* with Paul Butterfield), Happy and Artie (with several original compositions, *Cold Front* being the best of the lot), and little known folk artist Paul Seibel, who sings *Weary Blues*. Jim Rooney adds a very strong *Sleep With One Eye Open* as well. This is a wonderful effort by a group of very talented musicians, and will probably go by unnoticed save for a few, which may not be so bad after all.

## Diamantina Cocktail

Little River Band — Capitol

Not as good as their last effort, except for *Happy Anniversary*, which is very good. Not bad, but not exceptional either; it's merely mediocre. C

Michael Clark has been reviewing records for *Weekender* for quite some time. He calls them like he hears them, and we think he finishes in the money most of the time. His impressions of new rock releases appear regularly, and he grades them on a scale from A through F.

### the tops in pop

The top 20 singles in the pop music field, based on Billboard's survey of sales and broadcast play:

1. *I Just Want To Be Your Everything* — Andy Gibb
2. *I'm In You* — Peter Frampton
3. *Looks Like We Made It* — Barry Manilow
4. *My Heart Belongs To Me* — Barbara Streisand
5. *Pa Poo Ron Ron* — Shaun Cassidy
6. *Best Of My Love* — Emotions
7. *Do You Wanna Make Love* — Peter McCann
8. *Margaritaville* — Jimmy Buffett
9. *Higher And Higher* — Rita Coolidge
10. *Whatcha Gonna Do?* — Pablo Cruise
11. *You And Me* — Alice Cooper
12. *You Made Me Believe In Magic* — Bay City Rollers
13. *Easy* — Commodores
14. *Knowing Me, Knowing You* — Abba
15. *Undercover Angel* — Alan O'Day
16. *Angel In Your Arms* — Hot, Big Tree
17. *Just a Song Before I Go* — Crosby, Stills & Nash
18. *You're My World* — Helen Reddy
19. *Handy Man* — James Taylor
20. *Barracuda* — Heart

### the tops in country

The top 20 country and western singles, based on Billboard's survey of sales and broadcast play:

1. *It Was Almost Like A Song* — Ronnie Milsap
2. *I Can't Love You Enough* — Loretta Lynn, Conway Twitty
3. *Rolling With The Flow* — Charlie Rich
4. *I Don't Wanna Cry* — Larry Gatlin
5. *Honky Tonk Memories* — Mickey Gilley
6. *Way Down, Pledging My Love* — Elvis Presley
7. *A Song In The Night* — Johnny Duncan
8. *Making Believe* — Emmylou Harris
9. *A Tear Fell* — Billy "Crash" Craddock
10. *I'm The Only Hell* — Johnny Paycheck
11. *Play Born To Lose Again* — Dolly
12. *Till The End* — Vern Gosdin
13. *Rambling Fever, When My Blue Moon Turns To Gold Again* — Merle Haggard
14. *Cowboys Ain't Supposed To Cry* — Moe Bandy
15. *In The Jailhouse Now* — Sonny James
16. *Sanflower* — Glen Campbell
17. *She's The Girl Of My Dreams* — Don King
18. *Gentle To Your Senses* — Mel McDaniel
19. *Don't It Make My Brown Eyes Blue* — Crystal Gayle
20. *Barbara Don't Let Me Be The Last To Know* — Mel Street