

CHIME BELLS

THE BEST OF COUNTRY YODEL

By Popular demand

We are excited at Jasmine to be releasing our third album of country yodellers. When the first album was proposed a few years ago many people told us “there will be no demand for yodel records”. How wrong they were! The first two volumes (JASMCD 3552 and JASMCD 3554 respectively) have proven extremely popular and feedback indicates strongly that a third album is warranted. Volume Two triggered letters, emails and even radio shows about yodelling and since we first signalled our intention to compile a Volume Three, we have been pressed with enquiries as to when it would be available.

Now, Volume 3 follows in the same pattern as the first two volumes – a mix of well-known names from around the world alongside a few lesser-known names that you’ll wish you had discovered much earlier! In all cases these tracks are classics of their genre and show the versatility of the country yodel – from love songs to cowboy songs, blues to boogie, solo guitar accompaniment to western swing. Here are fast yodels, slow yodels, sad ones and happy, simple ones and some so tongue twisting that they are best attempted only when medical aid is available!

The Origins Of Yodelling In Country Music

There is not total agreement about how yodelling first became a part of country music. The reality seems to be that several influences combined to gradually bring the falsetto voice and the full yodel into both country songs and western music. This point as it relates to the music of the singing cowboys is discussed in the liner booklet to our 100 track 4CD set “A Cowboy’s Life Is Good Enough For Me” (JASBOX 13-4). The music of travelling European minstrels and families – often on the medicine shows – led to a gradual merging of Swiss, Austrian and German folksongs, “Volksmusik” with the traditional string bands, blues and ballads of America – themselves owing much to their Irish, Scottish, English and African roots. Also added to the mix was the falsetto singing of traditional Hawaiian vocalists.

Several of the early yodel songs from the first two decades of the 20th Century later re-emerged as country songs, notable examples being Matt Keefe’s “Silvery Moon” which resurfaced decades later as Slim Whitman’s “Roll On Silvery Moon”, Frank Kamplain’s “Sleep Baby Sleep” (also known as “Sleep Little One Sleep”) which was one of the first two songs recorded by Jimmie Rodgers and George Van Dusen’s “Mountain High” which subsequently emerged as Elton Britt’s immortal “Chime Bells” (the title track of this volume) via an intermediate incarnation as Harry Torrani’s classic “Happy And Free”.

So who was the first country singer to record yodelling? Well, that too is debatable depending who you consider to be a country singer. Frank Kamplain is believed to have recorded country songs as Frank Knapp and as such recorded Jimmie Rodgers material (see our tribute to Jimmie

Rodgers music “You & My Old Guitar” - JASMCD 3579). However he was almost certainly recording yodelling songs before Jimmie Rodgers. A less debatable point is the fact that the blind balladeer Riley Puckett – well-known for his work with Gid Tanner – recorded yodel songs, including “Sleep baby Sleep” and “Away Out On The Mountain” before Rodgers.

The Influence of Jimmie Rodgers

Nevertheless, most scholars and collectors would argue that whilst Jimmie Rodgers may not have been the first to yodel on a country record, he was almost single-handedly responsible for other country artistes incorporating the yodel into their music. Rodgers, a railroad worker who contracted Tuberculosis whilst still a young man, had always looked to music to earn him a living. He most likely learned yodelling either from watching travelling minstrels whilst a boy growing up in Meridian, Mississippi or during a stint as a black-face minstrel on a travelling show. He had learned blues stanzas from his black railroad colleagues and after exposure to yodelling travellers experimented with the yodel by adding it to love songs, popular ballads and blues. The result was to make him a household name during the late 20s and early 30s – not only in the USA but around the world – during a period when the depression was rife and record sales low!

Also known as “America’s Blue Yodeller” and “The Singing Brakeman”, Rodgers inspired Gene Autry, Red Foley, Ernest Tubb, Elton Britt, Hank Snow, Cliff Carlisle, Tex Morton, Yodeling Slim Clark, Patsy Montana, Rex Griffin, Stuart Hamblen, Buddy Williams, Red River Dave...the list goes on and on. Not all these artistes made their names as yodellers but they all started out including a yodel or two in their songs. Some, like Elton Britt, Tex Morton, Buddy Williams and Slim Clark, went on to become amongst the best yodellers that country music ever produced. They certainly inspired and influenced many of the great names that followed. Such esteemed names as Frank Ifield, David Houston, Roy Rogers, Slim Dusty, Slim Whitman and Kenny Roberts were influenced by some of the great names that were first inspired by Jimmie Rodgers.

The Most notable Exception to the Rodgers Influence

Perhaps most notable by exception was the great Canadian singing cowboy Wilf Carter, who became better known in the USA as Montana Slim. It is often assumed that Carter must have been a Rodgers devotee but this assumption is incorrect. Carter certainly came to love the music of Jimmie Rodgers and, in later years, recorded many of his songs with a passion that is to be admired. However, his inspiration came not from Rodgers but from one of those travelling European yodellers from a decade or so before Rodgers first entered a recording studio. Whilst still only a young boy, teaming oxen in Nova Scotia, Wilf ran away from home and came across a travelling show on which was billed “The Yodelling Fool”. Today, we cannot identify who the Yodelling Fool was but he so inspired the young Wilf Carter with his rendition of “Sleep Baby Sleep” that Wilf went up into the hills where the echo of his voice helped him learn to yodel. He later recalled this story in his song, “How My Yodelling Days Began”.

That Wilf went on to become one of country music’s finest yodellers is well known and he –

along with others - is a cited inspiration for Slim Clark, Frank Ifield, Slim Dusty, Slim Whitman and Wayne Horsburgh, to name just a few. If Jimmie Rodgers had never recorded, the most probable way that yodelling would have found its way into country music would have been through Wilf Carter.

The Western Music Connection

Through the music of Gene Autry, it became the popular thing to do for singing cowboys to yodel. Whereas Autry started out yodelling blues a la Jimmie Rodgers, he graduated to cowboy songs and would add a Rodgers-style yodel from time to time. He very soon dropped the yodel once his movie career picked up, although his record company continued to bill him as “The Yodling Cowboy” (sic). That was enough to cause other would-be celluloid spur-jinglers to try their hand at the silver-tongued skill and it was not long before Roy Rogers, Eddie Dean, Jimmy Wakely, Rex Allen and others were contributing yodels of their own.

When you want to jump on someone else’s bandwagon you have to prove you are up to the test. Some singing cowboys, like Wakely and Dean, yodelled only rarely but others like Roy Rogers and Rex Allen developed real skill at the art and evolved faster, slicker styles that built on the original monosyllabic yodels of Jimmie Rodgers and Gene Autry. The ladies were not to be outdone and before long Patsy Montana, Carolina Cotton, the Girls of The Golden West (Dolly & Millie Good) and Rosalie Allen were up there with the best. All of these yodellin’ gals have been featured in one or both of the previous two yodel albums on Jasmine and all but the Girls Of The Golden west are included in this third volume.

The Music In This Collection

As with Volume Two, in this third volume of country yodellers you will find some artistes that appeared on the previous albums and some that make their first appearance in this series on this CD.

Opening the collection is one of the greatest yodelling hits of all time, Elton Britt’s big hit “**Chime Bells**”. Britt was a disciple of Jimmie Rodgers but he was strongly influenced and inspired by England’s Harry Torrani, who is featured later in this collection. He groomed “Chime Bells” from Torrani’s “Happy And Free Yodel” but speeded the song up and added the now famous extended yodel. On Britt’s first Jasmine album (“Country Music’s Yodelling Cowboy Crooner Volume One” JASMCD 3565) we included his first solo recording of this celebrated song, made in 1939 with just his guitar for accompaniment. Here we open up with the classic re-recording made in 1947 in which Britt uses a full band. It is a masterpiece – perhaps an early example of “crossover country” – with the strings introducing Britt’s up-tempo waltz yodel. The tempo change in the second half of the song that signals the beginning of the yodel demonstration is even more stark on this recording than on the early one and the extended high note towards the end is the more amazing as the accordion cues the band to play “Turkey In The Straw”, “Oh Susannah”, “There’s A Star Spangled Banner Waving Somewhere” and “Dixie” before Britt comes back down to earth!

We follow Elton's masterpiece with the man who started it all – and the idol of Elton Britt – Jimmie Rodgers. We have chosen his beautiful love song **“Treasure Untold”**, recorded in 1928, which benefits from some delightful Hawaiian steel playing by Ellsworth T Cozzens, who co-wrote the song with Rodgers. Rodgers is followed by Wilf Carter, who was mainly associated with yodelling on western or pseudo-Swiss songs like “I’m Hitting The Trail” and “Swiss Moonlight Lullaby”. However, here he sings for us a sad tale of love gone wrong as he plaintively yodels **“My Heart’s Closed for Repairs”**, using a yodel that effectively achieves the melancholy mood of the song. This one dates back to 1950.

“Lovesick Blues” can be traced back to the music of blackface minstrel Emmet Miller and was later recorded by countless artistes from Rex Griffin to Hank Williams, Slim Whitman to Patsy Cline and Frank Ifield. Here we present a very rare recording from the early 50s by George Payne whom Frank Ifield cites as one of the best yodellers he ever heard. On this track, George uses a Rodgers style yodel to open and then adopts the voice-break style of singing, which uses the yodel technique. Many artistes claim that voice-break singing is actually far more difficult to sing accurately than outright yodelling.

Back in the 30s, Patsy Montana was a keen young western singer who was influenced by Jimmie Rodgers, worked with Gene Autry and idolised Elton Britt. She had once dated Britt and was amazed at the beauty of his yodelling. She told this writer, “back then I wouldn’t yodel if Elton Britt was within 500 miles!”. She need not have worried. As her version of **“If I Could Only Learn To Yodel”** shows, she was a fine exponent of the art. A lesser-known artiste was Canada’s Tex Bloye whose super-rare recording of **“Happy Go Lucky Boy”** – recorded around 1950 - follows.

Up amongst the yodellers’ top masters of the art is Kenny Roberts, “America’s King Of The Yodellers”, whose definitive version of **“She Taught Me To Yodel”** – first issued on the Coral label in 1953 – sets a benchmark that few could match. This track, like Britt’s “Chime Bells”, is one of the Gold Standards in yodelling. Roberts learned the song from watching his mentor, Elton Britt sing it on stage. When Roberts asked Britt if he would mind Roberts recording the song, Britt told him “only do it if you are going to do it better”. Roberts went away and wrote the now famous “Galloping Yodel” and “Mountain Climbing Yodel” that conclude the song and so set to wax one of the most legendary finishes in country music! At the time of writing we are planning a Kenny Roberts CD, hopefully for release later in 2007.

To follow Roberts, we come back to a less-frantically paced country swing ditty by Jesse Rogers who often claimed to be the cousin of Jimmie Rodgers. Jesse however mostly spelt his surname without the “D” that characterised the Blue Yodeller’s tag. Jesse was no mean yodeller himself however and gives out with some neat phrasing at the end of **“Mary from Maryland”**.

Rosalie Allen was a beautiful and talented country singer who made her commercial recording debut with RCA with her version of the Patsy Montana classic “I Want To Be A Cowboy’s Sweetheart”. This historic track can be heard on “Yodelling Mad: The Best Of Country Yodel

Volume One” (JASMCD 3554). She went on to record prolifically with RCA as a solo artiste and as a duet with Elton Britt, before moving on to Waldorf Music Hall and Palomino. On this current album Rosalie contributes a song written in part by Denver Darling, with whose band she often performed and also recorded. **“Ding Dong Polka”** (also known as “Ding Dong Bells”) shows that even in the mid 1950s, some years after her hey day, Rosalie Allen’s voice and yodel were undiminished!

Donn Reynolds was a Canadian and something of an ambassador of country music. He toured the world performing anywhere from major European cities to royal palaces to the old time country halls of outback Australia. He spent a couple of years working in Australia in the late 1940s and **“Salt Bush Sue”**, recorded in 1947, is one of several songs he wrote and recorded whilst he was there. Donn went on to appear in Hollywood films, enjoyed successful tours of the UK in the 1950s and married Cindy, one of the British Skylarks Trio pop group before eventually settling back in Canada. There he went on to gain places in the Guinness Book Of Records for his yodelling feats! At one time he was known as Canada’s King Of the Yodellers and he cited England’s Harry Torrani as a major influence.

Whilst Donn Reynolds was enjoying popularity in Australia, the influence of Wilf Carter was nowhere more clear than in the music of New Zealand’s Les Wilson, known as The Otago Rambler. Wilson’s vocal style, guitar playing and yodelling on his self-penned **“Yodelling Cowboy”** – which dates back to around 1951 - all owe much to Wilf Carter. The echo on the yodel was obtained by recording in a big room in an old building and turning to face away from the microphone when yodelling!

Earlier in these notes we mentioned that the singing cowboys each developed their own yodelling style. An excellent example is Rex Allen, who is often undervalued as a yodeller – perhaps because he rarely yodelled after the early days of his career in the 1940s. However on the Stuart Hamblen classic **“Texas Plains”** he shows the ringing, bell-like quality of his yodel, the effect being all the more impressive when contrasted with his rich, deep singing voice. Rex also has his own album on Jasmine, **“Riding All Day – The Life Of A Cowboy”** (JASMCD 3506).

Whilst Patsy Montana and Rosalie Allen may have led the way in the female yodelling stakes, the girl with the best voice and yodel could well be argued to have been the late Carolina Cotton, a sweet warbling beauty who recorded as a solo artiste and with various western swing bands including Deuce Spriggens, The Swing Billies and the Bob Wills Band. On **“Mockingbird Yodel”** she sings tongue-in-cheek of how different birdcalls have inspired her to yodel. Carolina can also be heard on **“I Love To Yodel: The Best Of Country Yodel Volume Two”**, on which she provides the title track. Carolina’s family have recently released a superb CD album of her material from records and radio and she now has an excellent website at www.carolinacotton.org.

Reg Lindsay enjoyed a long and successful career in his native Australia as well as in the USA where he won awards, appeared on the Grand Ole Opry and had a recording contract. Probably most remembered today for his modern country ballads and for his hit tribute to moonwalker Neil Armstrong, he started out in the early 50s as a yodeller and continued to yodel on at least one

song in every stage show until his retirement due to ill health in the mid 1990s. On the old Tex Ritter hit **“I’m Wasting My Tears On You”**, recorded around 1951, he shows how well he could slip in a tricky yodel, even on a country ballad.

Alberta Slim was English born – real name Eric C Edwards - but emigrated at an early age to Canada where he carved a career and an excellent reputation as a cowboy singer in a style at times reminiscent of Wilf Carter. He recorded for RCA and was awarded the title of “Best All-Round Cowboy” for his work with horses. His records have become rare, which is a great pity as he was a fine writer and could sing and yodel with ease. **“I Want To Be A Cowboy”** is a fine example of his music.

Paul Brunelle hailed from Quebec where the tradition of country music sung in French is very strong. Brunelle was an excellent singer and guitarist, at times more crooner than cowboy singer. On **“Le Boogie Woogie Des Prairies”** he accompanies himself on guitar and sings and yodels with aplomb! On a later recording of the same song, a full band was used, the song speeded up and the yodel absent. This track has lain unavailable for many years but as you will hear, is well deserving of a revival! Skeeter Bonn, born Junior Lewis Boughan in 1923, follows with the lively **“Yodeling Bird”**, probably recorded in 1956, which was also a success some years before for Rosalie Allen. Bonn, during his career was a star variously of WLS’ National Barn Dance in Chicago, WLW’s Midwestern Hayride in Cincinnati, Ohio and WWVA’s Wheeling Jamboree.

An early innovator was the Texas Drifter, Goebel Reeves, who developed a unique yodelling trill – apparently by yodelling through saliva at the back of the throat. The style was emulated by numerous artistes, most notably by Tex Morton, who merged the Reeves trill with the yodels of Harry Torrani and Jimmie Rodgers to produce the unique hybrid that became affectionately known as Queensland Opera! Tex can be heard demonstrating this style on several Jasmine releases including JASMCD 3554 **“I Love To Yodel: The Best Of Country Yodel Volume Two”** and JASMCD 3586 **“Old Faithful: Songs From The Saddle”**. Here we can listen to the man that started the trill in country yodelling as Goebel Reeves demonstrates it at its best on the tale of a fortune-seeking hobo who wants to return home and dreams of his Dinah, baby and a return to **“Happy Days”**. This song would have struck a poignant bell when it was first recorded in the depression days around 1934.

Kitty Prins was a Dutch singer who recorded country music in English as Texas Kitty and eventually moved to Belgium where she won Country Music awards for performing and radio presenting. She eventually retired in Belgium. A fine yodeller, she sings here her own tribute to the music of the 50s with her **“Mule Train Yodel Blues”** which has an eclectic range of references from Eddy Arnold’s **“Cattle Call”** – the yodel to which is featured in the breaks – to Tennessee Ernie’s **“Mule Train”**, even Johnny Ray and a reference to the influence of Jimmie Rodgers.

The Kitty Prins track is followed by a rare gem that will thrill many record collectors. Frank Ifield never commercially recorded Hank Snow’s **“Yodelling Back To You”** so this is taken from a super-rare transcription from the early 1950s. Whilst the sound quality is not quite as good as

most of the other tracks on this album, it is included for its rarity and because it is a superb performance. The track shows how remarkably clear and mature the Ifield voice was even though at the time he was still in his mid teens. For more rare, early recordings of Frank Ifield seek out his dedicated Jasmine album “The Yodelling Cowboy Years” on JASCD 443.

Although Frank Ifield became famous as a pop star, his roots were firmly in country music and his influences included Roy Rogers, Sons Of The pioneers, Elton Britt, Wilf Carter and, of course, Hank Snow. Another significant influence on Frank’s yodelling style was Harry Torrani, who follows with “**Cuckoo Waltz**”. Torrani started his working life as a coal miner in the Northern English town of North Wingfield and changed his name from Hopkinson to Torrani because “it sounded more Swiss”. He was a superb yodeller in many styles and inspired country yodellers in the USA, Canada and Australia.

The country-influenced 50s pop star Patti Page provides a rousing version of Patsy Montana’s “I Want To Be A Cowboy’s Sweetheart” – complete with yodel – before we move on to Canada’s Emilio Celsie, known as Little Slim. His recordings are so obscure that we felt duty bound to preserve “**Visit Me In My Swiss Chalet**” when the opportunity arose. Leo Celsie is also featured on JASMCD 3554 “I Love To Yodel: The Best Of Country Yodel Volume Two”.

Through the years, pseudo-Swiss songs have been a mainstay of the country yodellers ever since Wilf Carter’s 1933 classic “Swiss Moonlight Lullaby”. Most were sung in country style and, apart from the titles, did not sound “Swiss” at all! Probably the most authentic “Swiss” sounding country yodeller would have to be Yodelling Pete Skoglund whose recordings are – like so many of these fine artistes – now very rare. “**Swiss Echo Yodel**”, recorded around 1952, features a Swiss style yodel but is sung in English. His track is followed by an outstanding example of a country-sounding “Swiss” yodel in Jimmy Williams’ “**The Happy Swiss Yodellers**”. Typical of the genre, the song’s lyrics suggest that everyone in Switzerland spends all day yodelling and, if Williams’ yodels are anything to go by, that they yodel at breathtaking pace! Nothing could be further from the truth. Whilst many Swiss yodellers are capable of spectacular solo demonstrations of their art, most Swiss yodelling involves close harmony singing with slow-paced falsetto notes that soar and come down gently rather than in frantic warbles.

That is not to take anything away from Jimmy Williams’ recording. It is a superb example of country yodelling and seems to be strongly influenced by Kenny Roberts. Our attempts to find out more about Jimmy Williams have met with no success but the track seems to have been recorded around 1953. To follow Jimmy Williams, we go to another popular female vocalist of the 1950s in Bonnie Lou. She started out as a yodeller but had virtually dropped that side of her music by the time she recorded. Her many hit records no doubt vindicate her move to a more pop-influenced country sound, although her vocals occasionally showed that hint of a voice break. However on “**Texas Polka**” she brought back the yodel and it is probably the only recorded example of her singing in this style. A pity, as she seems to have been very good!

For any album that starts with Elton Britt’s “Chime Bells”, has Kenny Roberts’ “She Taught me To Yodel” in the middle and features Wilf Carter, Pete Skoglund, Carolina Cotton and other

yodelling luminaries along the way, the challenge has to be how to finish? Fear not. Yodeling Slim Clark to the rescue. This master of the speed yodel is true to the test and proves it with his rousing rendition of the tongue-twister novelty number, **“I Miss My Swiss”**. From the confident opening yodels, the listener knows this track is something special! Clark and Kenny Roberts were at one time jointly members of the Red River Rangers and used to try to out-yodel one another in friendly competition – Roberts favouring the Elton Britt style and Clark closer to Wilf Carter. Both were superb at their art as is shown in this CD. You might like to listen to more of Slim Clark in his dedicated CD “Cowboy And Yodel Songs” on JASMCD 3567.

So there you have it. 27 more tracks of the variety of styles and sounds that comprise country yodelling. Let us know what you think of the album and try Volumes One and Two if you have not already done so! There are many other country CDs on Jasmine, many western ones too and quite a few by artistes on this CD. Below, we have listed a few from our current catalogue – several including yodelling - that we think will appeal to you.

PAUL HAZELL, 2007

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