

'Americana' charts a musical melting pot

By David Zimmerman
USA TODAY

Mutant country stations that cross musical fences are horn-ing in on mainstream country stations' turf.

And starting this week, they get their own album chart, "Americana," in *Gavin*, a trade magazine that ranks radio air-play on charts.

Americana is a surprising mix of left-field country, Nashville vets, contemporary folk and lyric-oriented rock.

At No. 1 is the multi-artist *Tulare Dust: A Tribute to Merle Haggard*, followed by current albums from Nanci Griffith and Mary Chapin Carpenter. Also in the top 40, Lyle Lovett, the Mavericks, Jim Lauderdale, Waylon Jennings and Tom Petty.

Griffith, long a nonentity on radio, is now a heavy hitter on the fledgling chart of not-quite-categorizeable performers. "It's putting radio back where it was 20 years ago, when you heard things back to back that

didn't belong together but were great together."

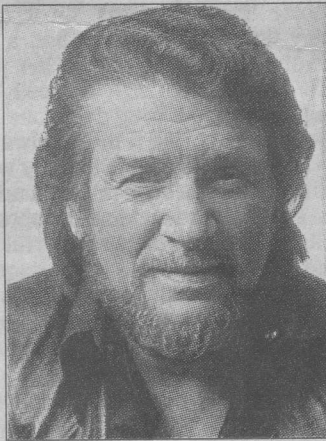
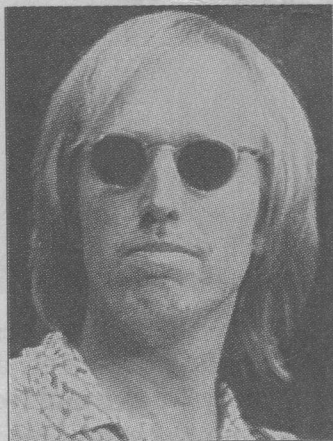
Gavin's Rob Bleetstein com-piles the chart from playlists of 50 representative stations around the country.

While hardly any stations play only what's on the chart, Bleetstein says about 20 are "extremely friendly" to the format. Others are mainstream country, "Triple A" (adult album alternative) and public radio stations that play Americana artists.

"I think Nashville has allowed itself to get a little stale. This'll shake 'em up," says Laura Ellen Hopper of KPIG-FM ("107 'oink' five") in California's Monterey Bay area. Hopper says the station's musical personality "balances on the top of a lot of fences."

The new chart's major impact, she says, will be alerting radio programmers to what's popular in regional markets, as many new artists get their start on hometown stations.

► Griffith finds her niche, 8D



Left photo by Jay Blakesberg

'AMERICANA': A mix from Tom Petty, left, (No. 27, 'Wildflowers'), to Waylon Jennings (No. 34, 'Waymore's Blues Part 2')