Music Notes

Montgomery Gentry - Lucky Men
Amy Edgerly

As a journalist of the female persuasion, I am tempted to open this article with "Boy, Howdy!"

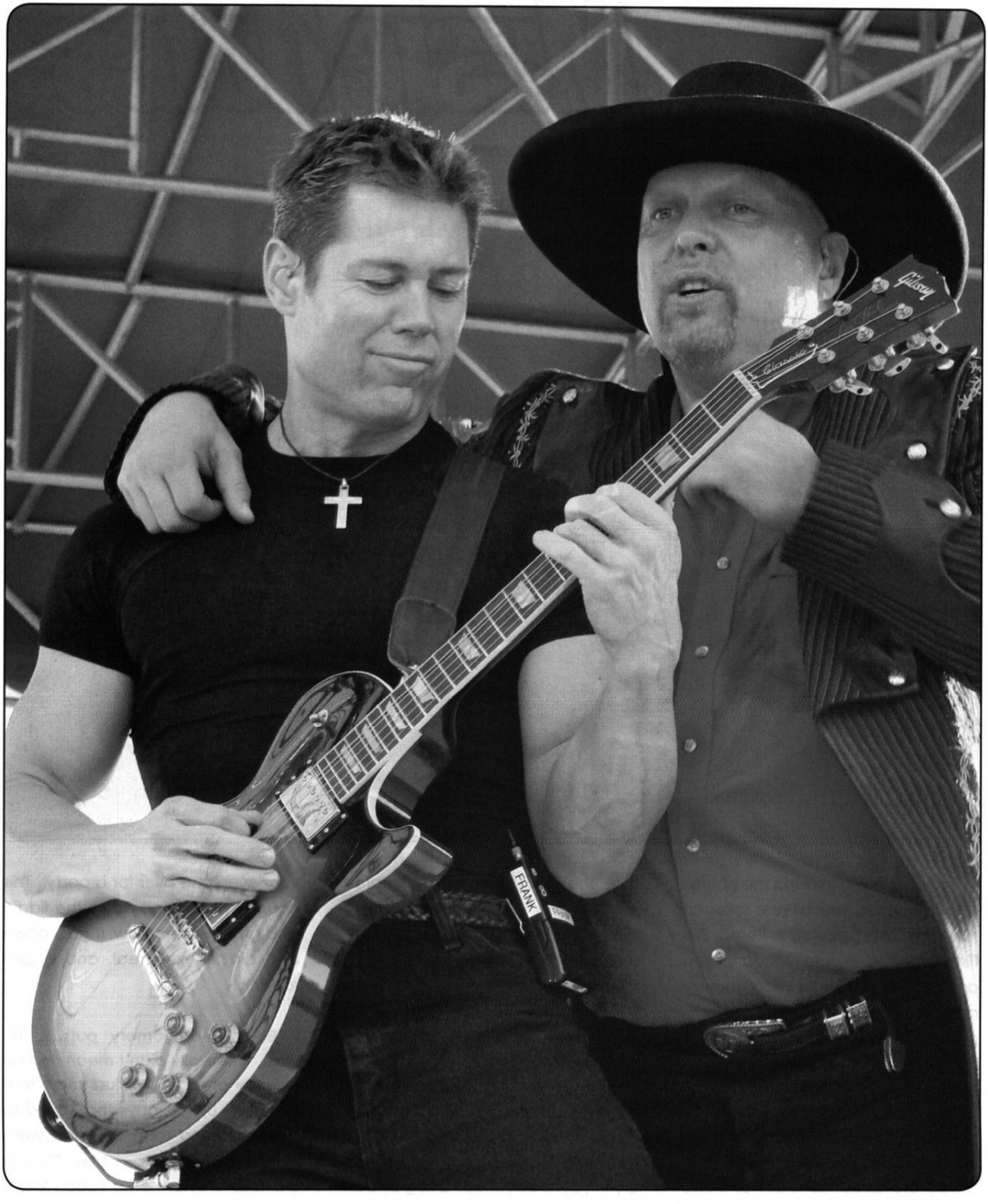
As you browse through the photos with this article, which were taken at the WKIS Chili Cook-off in Pembroke Pines, Florida in late January, you can see why. Eddie Montgomery and Troy Gentry are two big, burly, good-lookin' guys. In fact, if I were a little younger and a lot easier, I'd tell them both to "get in the truck".

But they'd never go for it.

You are about to learn as I did, that the two men who comprise Montgomery Gentry are men of steel: men of conviction, faith, commitment and purpose. They are fierce. They are a force of nature. They are men who ride.

They are also men who work hard at making country music. But this ain't your mom and dad's country. This is country that rocks. Country that kicks butt. This country doesn't cry in your beer, it taps a keg and invites everyone over for a party. This country doesn't git down the fiddle and git down the bow, it gets down and dirty, it gets real, and it gets rocking.

Eddie Montgomery puts it this way, "We really didn't mean it to be country or rock. We just knew that we grew up on guys that loved to have fun and raise hell and were great entertainers. Like Charlie Daniels, Waylon and Willie, Merle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Haggard, Skynyrd, the Allman Brothers and Hank, Jr. They wasn't politically correct, they went by their own set of rules, it was the entertainment rules. So that's the way we've kind of done our style. And I think it's why maybe everybody kind of likes us, too. It wasn't, go up there and play a song and don't say nothing to nobody. We was out there to have as much fun as everybody else and play great music."

That great music has brought Montgomery Gentry much deserved success. They debuted in 1999 with the release of their album *Tattoos and Scars*, which went platinum. In 2000, they earned the Country Music Association's award for Duo of the Year, the American Music Award for Favorite New Country Artist, and the Academy of Country Music Award for Top New Vocal Group or Duo. Two of their next three releases from 2002 – 2004 would also reach platinum status, *My Town* and *You Do Your Thing* (which contains two #1 singles, "Something To Be Proud Of" and "If You Ever Stop Loving Me"). Their single "Gone" from *You Do Your Thing* was the most played country single by a duo in 2005.

Not a bad little track record for a couple of guys who didn't really plan for their career to take the path it's taken. Both are from Kentucky, and they did work together initially in a band called Young Country which included Eddie's younger brother, John Michael Montgomery. When John Michael got a record deal, Eddie went with him and Gentry struck out on his own and had his own string of successes. But it was when Eddie and Troy were back at home, playing in honkytonks and charity events in the area, that they began to realize there was something more going on when they performed together than when they were apart.

Eddie Montgomery talked about when they first realized they ought to maybe forge the partnership: "People just liked to hear us sing together. They liked us when we were on stage together. We were, I reckon, a lot more entertaining than we was when we wasn't. We didn't know it as much as everybody else could see it. Finally, you know, when you got everybody coming to see you and you're packing out places when you play together, it kind of hits you on the head. You go, 'yeah, maybe we ought to go after a record deal'".

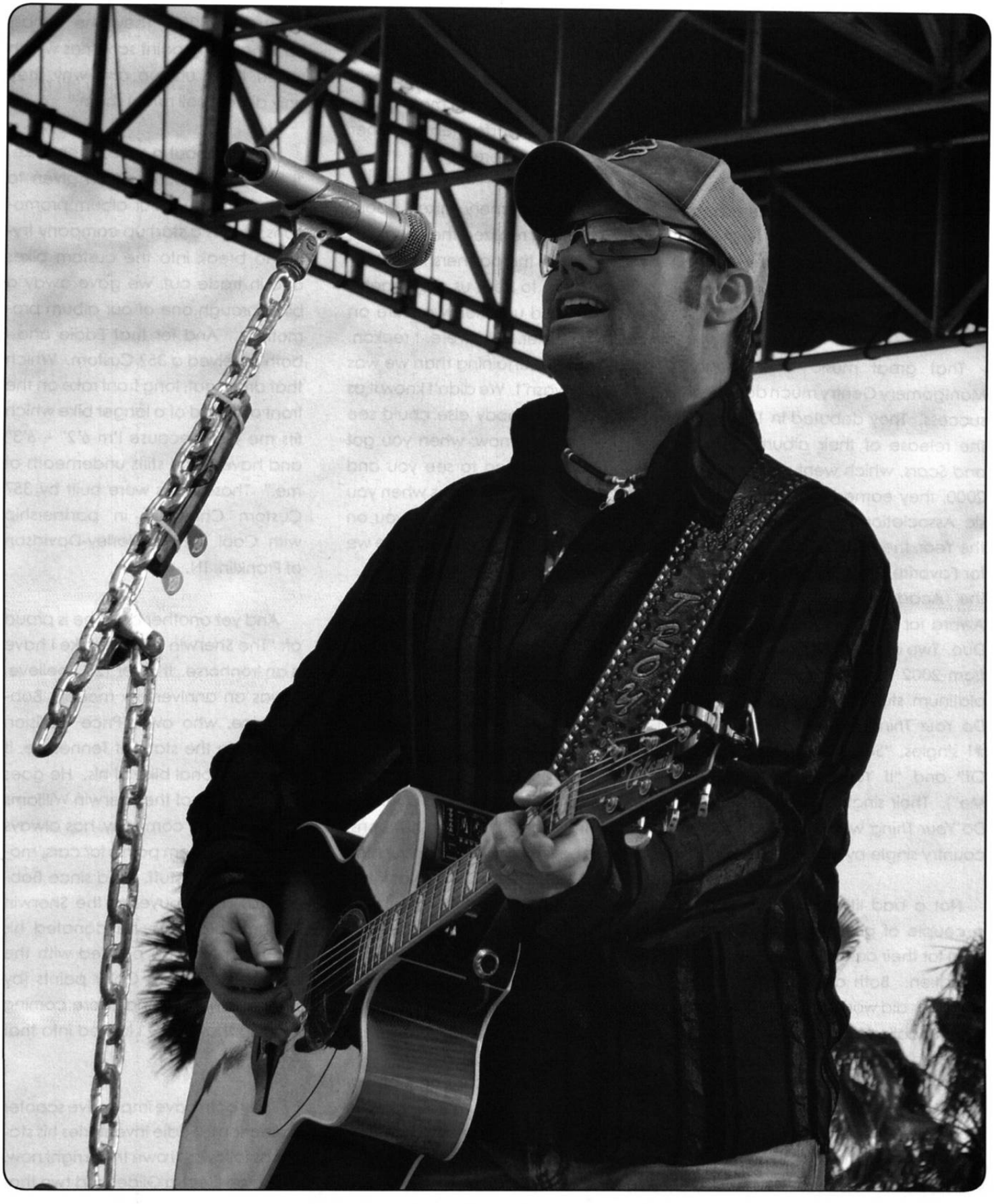
It was those first few record releases and their promotion that brought the guys some of the bikes they now own. Though Eddie has been riding since he was little: "Actually, I first got on a bike, on a scooter, or a mini-bike when I was about probably 5, 4 years old, and run it straight into a fence" – and Troy began riding in his teens: "I have been riding since about high school I guess, of and on. I was introduced through a girlfriend's brother who had a Honda Enduro 100 and we would ride it around the neighborhood" – they attained a couple of sweet rides after they became Montgomery Gentry.

Says Gentry, "Eddie and I, on our first or second album launch, we were given 2 of 25 Harley Davidsons, the Dyna Low Riders. It was the year that they introduced the Ford Harley truck [2000]. They [the Dynas] had matching paint schemes which made them unique and why they only did a small run of them."

He tells about a subsequent bike, "I also have a 357, again given to us during one of our album promotions. It was a start up company trying to break into the custom bikes and in trade out, we gave away a bike through one of our album promotions. And for that Eddie and I both received a 357 Custom. Which that drop seat, long front rake on the front of it, kind of a longer bike which fits me well because I'm 6'2" – 6'3" and have some stilts underneath of me." Those bikes were built by 357 Custom Choppers in partnership with Cool Springs Harley-Davidson of Franklin, TN.

And yet another baby he is proud of: "The Sherwin Williams bike I have is an Ironhorse. It's 1 of 125, I believe. It was an anniversary model. Bobby Price, who owns Price Collision Centers in the state of Tennessee, it was a personal bike of his. He goes through a lot of the Sherwin Williams Paints with his company, has always had their custom paints for cars, motorcycles and stuff. And since Bobby was a big buyer of the Sherwin Williams products, he donated his bike to me, to be painted with the new line of Planet Color paints [by Sherwin Williams] that were coming out. So that's how I lucked into that bike."

They both have impressive scooter collections. Eddie inventories his stable as follows: "I own three right now. I have an Electra Glide, and two that



was custom built. I have one, it's a P.O.W. bike that I had built that actually goes out to my great-uncle that I'm named after, that was killed in Iwo Jima. It's really special because the seat come from the movie "The Green Berets" which John Wayne carried and it was his duffel bag. It's a rigid tail, with a springer front end on it. And then I got a Vengeance that Sherwin Williams, Planet Color come out with a new paint – the paint is unbelievable, it changes colors as you go around it." And like most guys with the bug, he dreams of his next ride, "I'm kind of wanting to look around. I wouldn't mind finding one with a suicide clutch, but that's going to be later on and I'm going to have to redo one, maybe a Bobber or something, I'm not sure."

As Troy puts it, "Eddie and I have been very lucky being around the motorcycle enthusiasts."

But when do they find the time to get these scoots on the pavement and where do they like to ride? Eddie's jovial answer: "Anywhere it's warm, Baby! You know... There's beautiful country everywhere. Up there in the Dakotas, in Californa. Gosh! You know as long as I keep my scooter on two wheels, now I can't never say there's been a bad ride." To Troy, there is no place like home: "Anytime I have the chance and the weather permitting, we get out and ride around the neighborhood. I live outside of Nashville, in Franklin, and there's a lot of pretty backroads going up through the ridges and everything, so a lot of great riding to be done around my neighborhood."

But they actually take their bikes on the road with them and not only get wind in their face when they can for their own enjoyment, but they participate in numerous charity rides and events around the country and at home. For instance, this year they will host for the 4th year in a row, a charity ride which takes place around the Academy of Country Music Awards in Las Vegas in March. Montgomery sits on the board of the ACM Charitable Fund which promotes music education and humanitarian programs, and which the ride benefits.

Gentry boasts of the ride's growth in a few short years. "We started out 4 years ago and had less than 300 bikes in this ride. And last year we had over 1200 bikes. This year I think we're expecting close to 2,000 or better bikes in the ride. I think we started out with 3 or 4 celebrities, but last year we had over 8 other artists, Dierks Bentley and Keith Urban, Trick Pony, Emerson Drive and Shelly Fairchild have been a part of it. But it just grows every year."

Eddie and Troy also participate in the annual Frank Wycheck (former Tennessee Titan) Ride benefiting Special Olympics of Tennessee, and the Dierks Bentley Miles and Music Ride which benefits Vanderbilt Children's Hospital in Nashville.

Troy sums up one of the characteristics of the riding community that we can all take pride in, "Motorcycle riding is such an event that's for everybody, it just seems that you see more of those events raising monies for charities than you do almost any other event."

Montgomery Gentry's full open throttle brand of blue collar country music is also a great fit when it comes to entertaining bikers as well. They have been hired repeatedly to play numerous bike rallies around the U.S. in the course of their career, including Daytona Bike Week, Myrtle Beach, Buffalo Chip Campground at Sturgis, and the Heritage Rally during Charleston Bike Week.

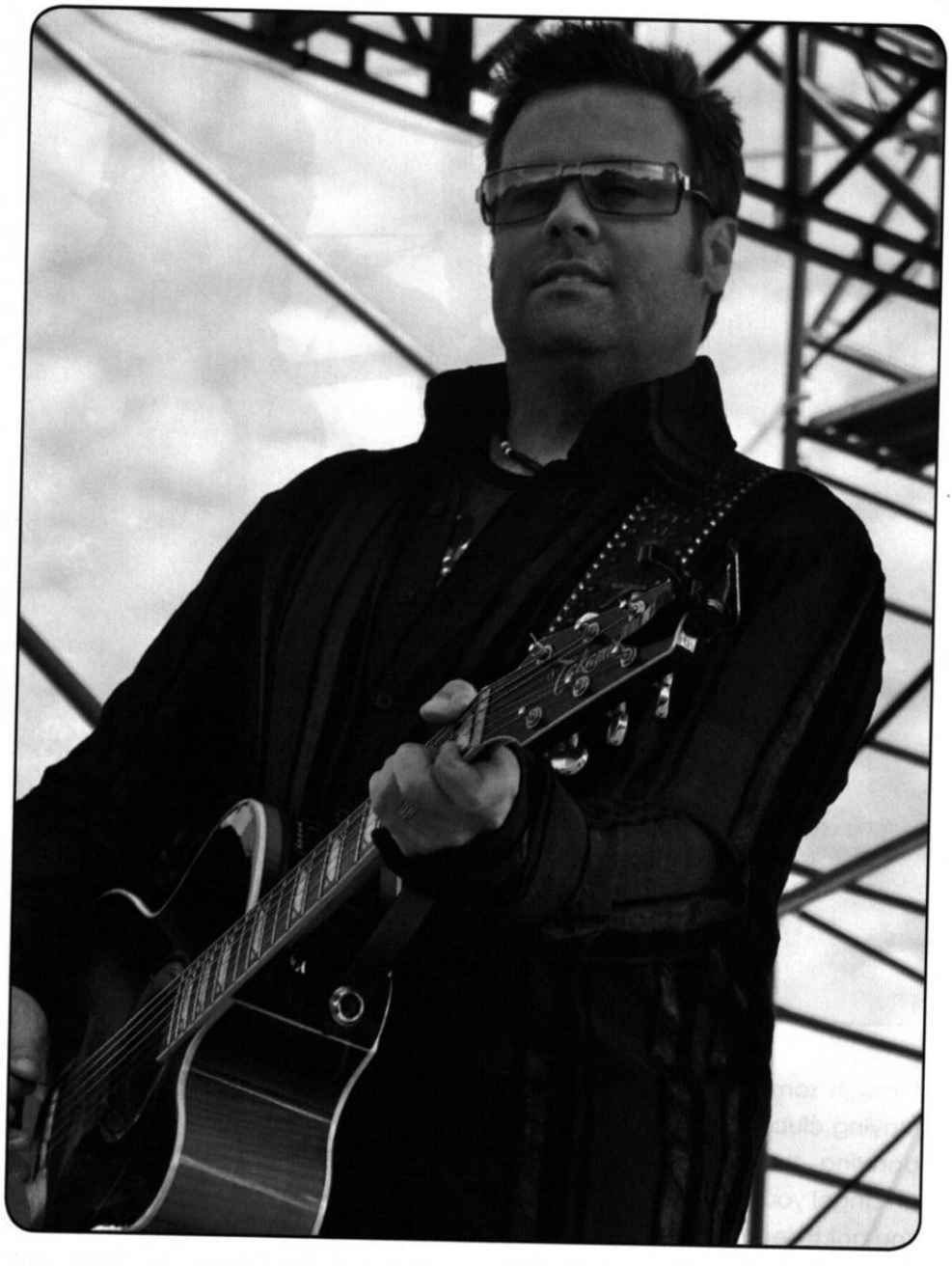
They are currently touring to promote the latest release in their string of six records *Some People Change*, the title cut being the first single released from it and rapidly climbing the country charts. For me and my money, it's their best to collection to date. While the songs on *SPC* are just as fun and just as touching as what we are used to hearing from MG, there is something just a little bit more this time out. For one thing, both Montgomery and Gentry have contributed their own songs, which prove to be as polished and full of heart as anything to have come from their team of top-notch writers. For another thing, it's more grown up.

I like the way they put it themselves: Eddie says "This album here is probably a little bit more internal and a little bit more about us, about our lives." Troy adds "It's something that's evolving as we grow older and wiser. We made a conscious effort to record songs more that defined us as family men, and our religious backgrounds, and our views and takes on life. I still think it's a blue collar type of record that anybody

out there can listen to and feel that they could be a part of. But instead of us singing in third person, it's more about our lifestyles and more personal."

They co-wrote two songs each on the album. The most personal songs from both are Montgomery's "Clouds" and Gentry's "If You Want To Keep An Angel". They each tell about how those songs came into being.

About "Clouds" Eddie relates, "A long time actually a lot of people didn't even know until I wrote the song that I had a three year old son that got killed in a car wreck and my dad died of cancer. I've said stuff about my dad before, but never about my son. And I said I would never write or sing anything about him until it come to me, and I figured it was going to have to come from above. So all at once one day I was at a good friend's house, Jeffrey Steele, who writes a lot of stuff for us, I was standing on his front porch and bam, these lyrics come to me and I went in and told Jeffrey and Jeffrey said, 'oh man, let me set down on the piano'. Jeffrey, Tony Mullins and I wrote the song within 5 to 8 minutes."



When I asked if he had trouble performing it live, he told me, "I'm getting a little better at it, but it's still an emotional song. Because I basically wrote it for me, to help me, and all at once I look out and I see all these other people that's getting tore up and people come to me and we've gotten letters that told us that they've had somebody close to them that's passed away and it's helping them. So I never even thought about that, you know? It's definitely one of them songs that can hit you really quick if you ain't careful."

Troy tells the story of "If You Want To Keep An Angel": "The guys I was writing with, Rivers Rutherford and Tom Shapiro, we were talking about the old bar days. We've all played in bars and spent countless hours either myself bartending or playing in bars, and seeing the same guys come in through the same doors year after year after year. And you know how some of them try to hold on to their youth by hanging out in the bars and hitting on the chicks and everything else. And how fortunately through that bar life we had all three found somebody very special to us to pull us out of there and make us better men. And even

through some of our bad habits of playing clubs and the drinking and partying, that if you were to keep an angel you gotta learn to fly right. You got to learn to adapt and make the changes to make your relationship work in trying to play music and chase a dream down. So it's pretty much an anthem to our wives and what they do for us."

Eddie also helped write "A Man's Job" which is a belly laugh of a song that turns the tables gender-wise on the proverbial mid life crisis and May-December romance. Troy additionally contributed "Takes All Kinds" which is an insightful observation of the diversity of humankind, and the essential contribution of every single living breathing person one encounters in the course of daily life. (As my church pastor once said, "there is not a single person you have ever locked eyes with that does not matter...", which pretty much sums up that song, I think.)

Eddie Montgomery and Troy Gentry have a friendship and partnership that has brought them much success and happiness. They affectionately call each other "T" and "E" or "T-Roy" and "Edweirdo". When we look at them in action we are reminded of our own close friendships or memories of the same. They are folks like us, or like we strive to be. They both have beautiful smiles. I was going to ask them to what they attribute the source of those smiles, but it turned out I didn't have to. I bet you Ben Franklins to burnouts that their smiles beam because they have learned as they have grown older and wiser to count their blessings. They have made a public habit of doing it, so we can assume the same of them in their private lives. They are thankful for God and country, for their families and our heroes, for beautiful backroads and the gift of song. Though neither of them wrote it, I'm pretty sure they identify closely with the lyrics of the song, "Lucky Man", another cut from *Some People Change*:

I know I'm a lucky man
God's given me a pretty fair hand
Got a house and a piece of land
A few dollars in a coffee can
My old truck's still runnin' good
My ticker's tickin' like they say it should
I got supper in the oven, a good woman's lovin'
And even my bad days ain't that bad
Lord knows I'm a lucky man

For Montgomery Gentry music and merchandise, and their current tour schedule, visit:
www.montgomerygentry.com

Websites relevant to this article:

Acmcf.org
Hdcoolsprings.com
357customs.com
vengeancemotorcycles.com
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