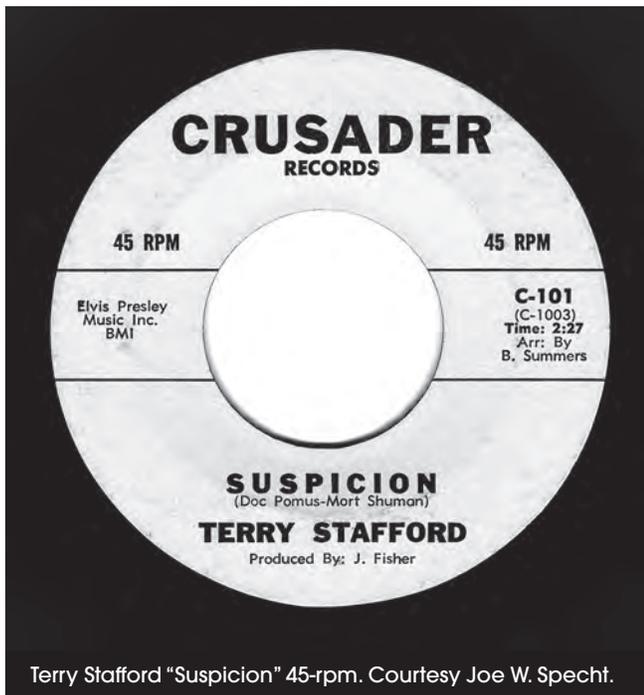


“Amarillo By Morning”
The Life and Songs of Terry Stafford ¹

Joe W. Specht



In the early months of 1964, on their inaugural tour of North America, the Beatles seemed to be everywhere: appearing on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, making the front cover of *Newsweek*, and playing for fanatical crowds at sold out concerts in Washington, D.C. and New York City. On *Billboard* magazine's April 4, 1964, Hot 100 list, the "Fab Four" held the top five positions.² One notch down at Number 6 was "Suspicion," by a virtually unknown singer from Amarillo, Texas, named Terry Stafford. The following week "Suspicion" – a song that sounded suspiciously like Elvis Presley using an alias – moved up to Number 3, wedged in between the Beatles' "Twist and Shout" and "She Loves You."³ The saga of how a Texas boy met the British Invasion head-on, achieving almost overnight success and a Top-10 hit, is one of triumph and disappointment, a reminder of the vagaries that are a fact of life when pursuing a career in music. It is also the story of Stafford's continuing development as a gifted songwriter, a fact too often overlooked when assessing his career.



Terry Stafford "Suspicion" 45-rpm. Courtesy Joe W. Specht.

Terry LaVerne Stafford was born on November 22, 1941, in Hollis, Harmon County, Oklahoma, in the southwestern corner of the state. He was seven years old when the family moved west to Amarillo, where he grew up on the wind-swept plains of the Texas Panhandle.⁴ The 6-foot 3-inch Stafford excelled in sports, starring in both baseball and basketball at Palo Duro High School, before graduating in 1960.⁵

Music was an important part of Stafford's life, too. In a 1980 interview with Robert Dalley for *Goldmine* magazine, he recalled, "My dad played a little guitar, so I was always trying to play and sing as I was growing up. I made my singing debut when I was only ten years old singing at the local Moose hall. I sang a couple of Hank Williams tunes, 'Your Cheatin' Heart' and 'You Win Again.' ... Later on I joined a country band whose leader was Eugene Nelson. ... I also got some exposure to Texas swing music [with] Roy Terry & the Pioneer Playboys."⁶

Amarillo has a rich country music heritage. A Panhandle fiddle tradition personified by Alexander "Eck" Robertson, who first brought the distinctive Texas fiddle style to the national scene in 1922, dates to at least the town's founding in 1887.⁷ In the 1930s, Son Langsford, Bob Wills's cousin, fronted the Sons of the West, a western swing band with a popular presence not only in Amarillo but also in Borger, Pampa, and surrounding towns; after World War II, Billy Briggs and the XIT Boys enjoyed a similar local renown.⁸

In the mid-1950s, a nascent rock and roll movement also emerged. After watching Elvis Presley bring the house down at Amarillo's Municipal Auditorium on October 13, 1955, the

Rhythm Orchids, led by West Texas State College students Buddy Knox (from Happy) and Jimmy Bowen (of Dumas), became part of the West Texas rockabilly vanguard.⁹ The rock beat caught Terry Stafford's ear, too. "I really liked Buddy Holly and Elvis, they were major influences on my singing style."¹⁰ Stafford became the vocalist with another pioneering Panhandle combo, the Rhythm Teens, organized by Rick Tucker and Larry Trider.¹¹

After graduating from Palo Duro High and with plans to seek his musical fortune, Stafford headed to northern California to stay with an aunt, later relocating to the Los Angeles area to live with a cousin, Ted Bevan. For the next two years, Stafford moved back and forth from California to Texas before deciding to remain in Los Angeles, where he began competing in talent shows at such venues as the El Monte Legion Stadium.¹² His cousin managed the Lively Ones, a surf group under contract to Del-Fi Records. Oftentimes the band invited Stafford on stage to sing at their dances, and this led to an opportunity to make a demo tape in 1962. As Stafford explained, "The Lively Ones were recording at the Sound House Studios in El Monte with Bob Summers. I decided that I would like to record at the Sound House, so I picked a tune off of an Elvis Presley album, called 'Suspicion.' Bob Summers played all the instruments except bass. ... We took the tape around to all the major labels in town ... but they all turned it down."¹³

Along the way, Gene Weed, a disc jockey at KFWB (980 AM) and a fellow Texas expat, heard the tape and contacted Herb Alpert at A&M Records. Although Stafford did cut two songs for A&M – "You Left Me Here to Cry" b/w (backed with) "Heartaches on the Way" (A&M 707) – Alpert passed on "Suspicion." A year later Stafford's cousin, Ted Bevan, who was now his manager, sent the tape on to John Fisher, president of newly launched Crusader Records.¹⁴ Stafford resumes his account, "John Fisher liked it and he did some remixing and mastering and promised to have it out by January, 1964. ... 'Suspicion' (Crusader C-101) was the 'Pick of The Week' on KFWB. The single and the album took off from there."¹⁵

Terry Stafford discovered "Suspicion" on Elvis Presley's 1962 album *Pot Luck with Elvis* (RCA Victor LPM/LSP 2523). The "King of Rock and Roll" waxed the song at a late night-early morning session on March 19, 1962, in Nashville at RCA's Studio B.¹⁶ A tom-tom-like percussion propels the momentum of the lyrics with the Jordanares chiming in on the chorus. As Presley archivist-discographer Ernst Jorgensen points out, "[Suspicion] seemed built to showcase every little vocal trick in [Elvis'] bag, without ever developing into parody. ... It had *hit* written all over it."¹⁷ Nevertheless, the song remained tucked away on Side 2 of *Pot Luck* until Terry Stafford rescued it.

"Suspicion" was written by Doc Pomus and Mort Shuman.

Pomus, née Jerome Solon Felder, had been on the New York City music scene for twenty years, first as a singer and bandleader and then as songwriter. After teaming with Shuman in 1958 and under contract to Hill & Range, the publisher that controlled the music recorded by Elvis, the two delivered a string of hits for the Drifters, Dion and the Belmonts, Andy Williams, the Mystics, and especially Presley: "A Mess of Blues," "Surrender," "Little Sister," "(Marie's the Name) His Latest Flame," and "Viva Las Vegas" to name a few.¹⁸ Pomus also took a fledgling Phil Spector under his wing. Spector, who soon became a world-famous record producer and creator of the so-called "Wall of Sound," hung out at the Brill Building, headquarters to music agencies and publishers including Hill & Range.¹⁹ Spector produced some demos of Pomus's compositions for Elvis Presley, perhaps even the "Suspicion" demo.²⁰

"Suspicion" is a snapshot of a relationship unraveling from within. "Ev-'ry time you kiss me / I'm still not certain that you love me / Ev-'ry time you hold me / I'm still not certain that you care." The singer is unable to overcome his doubt, his suspicion. "Though you keep on saying / You really, really, really love me / Do you speak the same words / To someone else when I'm not there?" Is the singer's distrust getting the better of him or is there truly cause for the persistent dread? The listener is left to decide. "Suspicion torments my heart / Suspicion keeps us apart / Suspicion why torture me!"

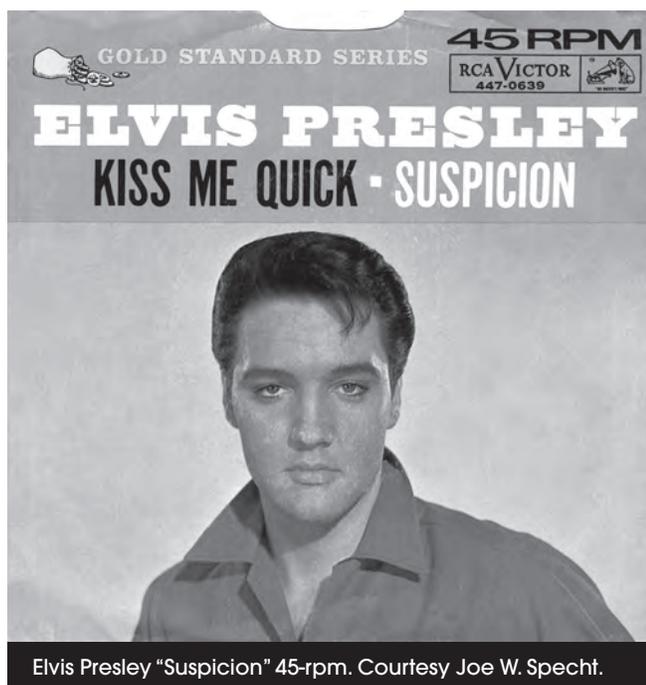
Much has been made of Stafford's "sounds-like Elvis" way of singing, and he is often categorized as a Presley imitator, just another one of the "Elvoids."²¹ Over the years, Stafford

gracefully acknowledged the influence and similarities. "I have always been a big fan of Elvis' ever since I heard his first record. I spent a lot of time listening to his records so I might have picked up some of his phrasing."²² However, as his subsequent career proves, Stafford was far more than a mere Presley clone.

If Terry Stafford's vocals are what first catch the listener's attention, it is the sound that Bob Summers achieves in the production that gives "Suspicion" much of its singular appeal. When Stafford recorded the demo, Summers chose to center the melody around a reoccurring organ riff or refrain, what one observer called a "quirky flourish ... the rinky-dink keyboard that plays throughout."²³ According to John Fisher, placing a paper bag over the organ's Leslie speaker further enhanced the distinctive accompaniment.²⁴ In addition, on the final mix for the commercial release, a vocal chorus with prominent female voices echoes sympathetically, intermingling with Stafford's sleek delivery. Combine all of this with the paranoid mood of the Pomus breakup suite, and the result is a pop masterpiece. The song has twice had Top-40 success on *Billboard's* country chart: in 1972 for Bobby G. Rice (Royal American 48) and in 1988 for Ronnie McDowell (Curb 10508).²⁵ In 2008, Bob Summers, again playing most of the instruments, produced Ed Greenwald's "Suspicion" (BSM Sounds), which was intended as part of an iTunes download tribute to Stafford.²⁶

Terry Stafford's recording of "Suspicion" entered *Billboard's* *Hot 100* list on February 22, 1964, and began a steady ascent.²⁷ By March 28, it reached Number 9, poised to break the Beatles stranglehold on the Top 5.²⁸ The song remained in the Top 10 for seven consecutive weeks.²⁹ Stafford received an invitation to appear on Dick Clark's *American Bandstand* on March 28, 1964, to sing (lip-synch) his hit record. During the requisite interview afterwards, Stafford was modest, self-effacing, and looking a bit uncomfortable still getting used to the national exposure. Like many, Dick Clark was intrigued by the "sound" of the record, and he inquired, "May I ask how you got that peculiar sound in the background? Is there any particular instrumentation that caused it to sound the way it does?"³⁰ "It's an organ," Stafford explained. "Sounds like muted trumpets to me, but it's an organ."³¹

Two weeks after lip-synching on *American Bandstand*, Stafford made his first public appearance on the East Coast at the Paramount Theater in New York City as part of the "Good Guys" show sponsored by radio station WMCA (570 AM). Others on the bill were Sam Cooke, the Four Seasons, Ruby and the Romantics, and Lesley Gore.³² The various package shows afforded Stafford the chance to rub shoulders with some of his favorites. "Muhammad Ali [then Cassius Clay] had a record out at the time, and he would come backstage



with his entourage; it was all very exciting. I was working with the legends of the music business, people like Jerry Lee Lewis, James Brown and Roger Miller. ... I enjoyed seeing them all because there were some great entertainers on those shows.”³³

Back in Los Angeles, John Fisher assembled eleven recently recorded Stafford tracks along with the hit record for an album, not surprisingly titled *Suspicion!* (Crusader CLP-1001). Bob Summers handled the arranger’s duties, and disc jockey Gene Weed was on board to write the liner notes. “‘Suspicion’ is defined as ‘an inkling or hint’ and that is what Terry’s recording has been for you, only a hint of what is to be found on this album.” Crusader Records placed an ad in *Billboard* announcing the release of *Suspicion!* “First artist to break the Beatles barrier! Terry Stafford’s first album and it’s a winner. An exciting album containing the smash single ‘Suspicion’

right good luck so far. Does the future scare you at all? You know once you get one hit you have to get the second. Now you’ve had two in a row. Do you worry about the third one yet?”³⁸ Stafford frankly admitted, “Sure ... I think it’s always something that always scares you.”³⁹

The “third one” proved to be elusive. Even though the *Billboard* review gave “Follow the Rainbow” (Crusader C-109) a thumbs-up — “Another relaxing sound from young Stafford. Sounds like this could be his third hit in a row” — it and a fourth Crusader single, “Hoping” b/w “A Little Bit Better” (Crusader C-110), went nowhere.⁴⁰ The popularity of “Suspicion” persisted, though, and Stafford was on the road during the summer and fall of 1964, touring the United States and Canada. In November, Stafford, along with Dot recording artist Jimmie Rodgers and one of Phil Spector’s girl groups,

Muhammad Ali (then Cassius Clay) had a record out at the time, and he would come backstage with his entourage; it was all very exciting. I was working with the legends of the music business, people like Jerry Lee Lewis, James Brown and Roger Miller.

and many other top-flight performances in the sensational ‘Suspicion Style.’”³⁴ One of the songs Terry sings “in sensational ‘Suspicion Style’” is “Kiss Me Quick,” also from Elvis’s *Pot Luck* album. It, too, was written by Doc Pomus and Mort Shuman.

With Stafford’s Crusader 45 (45 r.p.m., a record designed to play at 45 revolutions per minute, also known as a “single”) already in *Billboard*’s Top 10, RCA belatedly attempted to muscle in on the action by combining Presley’s “Suspicion” with “Kiss Me Quick” (RCA Victor 447-0639), but it was too late. The record-buying public had already declared Stafford’s million-seller the winner. Elvis’s single with “just over” 200,000 copies sold was his “worst performing” to date.³⁵ London Records picked up the option to release Stafford’s version in the U.K., and “Suspicion” circulated worldwide as London issued label-specific 45s in Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Germany, Greece, Holland, Hong Kong, Italy, Japan, New Zealand, the Philippines, and Venezuela. Stafford even re-recorded “Sospetto” in Italian.³⁶

Stafford was clearly on a roll. The follow-up ballad, “I’ll Touch a Star” (Crusader C-105), advanced to Number 25 on the *Hot 100*.³⁷ He returned to *American Bandstand* for a second time on July 18, 1964. During the on-camera interview with Dick Clark, the host asked, “You’ve had

the Crystals, flew to Australia for appearances in Sydney and in Wellington, New Zealand.”⁴¹

However, things were not going well at Crusader Records. In August, *Billboard* reported “the sudden departure” of John Fisher.⁴² “At the time they [Crusader] were having management difficulties,” Stafford told Robert Dalley, “and I was having contractual disputes so everything fell apart.”⁴³ According to Don Perry, who met Stafford through Bob Summers and later worked with the singer, Crusader advanced Stafford “a few thousand dollars,” but when the company went belly-up, “Terry never received another dime in royalties.”⁴⁴ A cache of Fisher-produced Crusader tracks have never been released, either.⁴⁵

After the disappointment at Crusader, Stafford regrouped. He maintained his association with both Bob Summers and John Fisher. Indeed, these two men continued to fill important roles off and on throughout Stafford’s career. Mel Shauer, Stafford’s new manager, first worked out a deal with Mercury Records.⁴⁶ With Bob Summers at the control board, Stafford recorded “Forbidden” and “Out of the Picture” (Mercury 72538). “Forbidden,” an obvious “Suspicion” imitation, was penned by Bobby Lile, and “Out of the Picture” is the handiwork of the hit-writing team of Tommy Boyce and Bobby Hart. However, neither tune created much excitement among fans.

Mel Shauer next took his client to Sidewalk Productions, the company founded in 1964 by twenty-year-old Mike Curb, the youthful impresario who would go on to form his own group, the Mike Curb Congregation, become president of MGM Records and later Curb Records, and serve as lieutenant governor of California.⁴⁷ The ubiquitous Bob Summers was Curb's associate at Sidewalk, and when the two began producing movie soundtracks for American International Pictures, Summers enlisted Stafford's participation.

Summers also arranged and presided over the release of two Sidewalk singles for Stafford: "When Sin Stops — Love Begins" b/w "Soldier Boy" (Sidewalk 902) and "The Joke's on Me" b/w "A Step or Two Behind You" (Sidewalk 914). "A Step or Two Behind You" is a Stafford original. The affiliation with Mike Curb allowed Stafford the opportunity to further hone his songwriting skills ("Judy," the flipside of "Suspicion," was a Stafford co-write). He furnished former Cricket Jerry Naylor with "Would You Believe" (Tower 214), and he even tried his hand at producing.⁴⁸ With Bob Summers arranging, Stafford supervised Stan Lee Black's revival of a couple of oldies, "Be Bop a Lula" and "Raining in My Heart" (Alamo International 222).⁴⁹

Le Spie Vengono dal Semifreddo or *Dr. Goldfoot and the Girl Bombs* (Tower T 5035) became the first soundtrack album on which Stafford was involved. Filmed in Italy and starring Vincent Price as the mad scientist, Dr. Goldfoot, the 1966 drive-in snoozer is the sequel to *Dr. Goldfoot and the Bikini Machine*.⁵⁰ Stafford's "Try My World Little Girl" with that

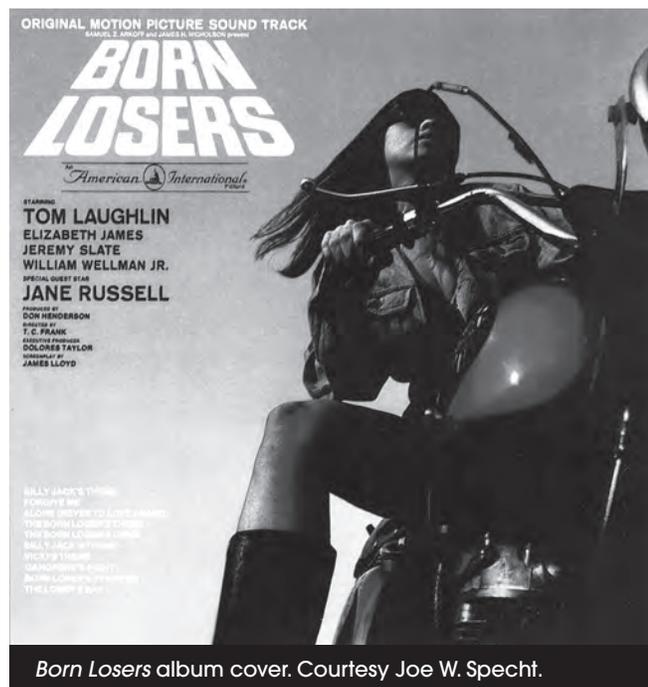
distinctive organ sound, this time spotlighted in a doodling psychedelic instrumental break, could well be an outtake from Crusader Records. Curb and Summers included Stafford singing two selections — "Forgive Me" and "Alone Never to Love Again" — on the soundtrack of *Born Losers* (Tower T 5082). This is the movie that introduced Tom Laughlin as "Billy Jack" battling a motorcycle gang in a small California town.⁵¹ "Forgive Me" plays in the background of the pool hall scene when the sheriff confronts the gang.

For 1969's *Wild Wheels*, Stafford also made his big screen acting debut as "Huey," a dune buggy-riding surfer whose club tangles with a motorcycle pack.⁵² Shot on Pismo Beach, *Wild Wheels* starred Don Epperson, a familiar face to American International Pictures devotees.⁵³ Stafford, the thespian, does not steal any scenes, but he does get to sing "Wine, Women, and Song" for his pals and their bikini-clad girlfriends at an after-dark clambake. "Night Ride," written by Stafford, is a tune faintly heard on the jukebox in the biker bar. "Night ride the sun has fallen / Night ride the winds are howling / Night ride the dunes are calling me." With the Pacific Ocean as backdrop, Terry and Don Epperson, both with guitars in hand, are posed atop dune buggies on the front cover of the soundtrack album (RCA Victor LSO 1156).

In February, prior to the filming of *Wild Wheels*, Stafford and Bob Summers for Sidewalk Productions pitched two of Terry's compositions to Warner Brothers Records, and the company agreed to release a single, "Big in Dallas" b/w "Will a Man Ever Learn" (Warner Brothers 7286), that showcases both Stafford's versatility as a singer and songwriter.⁵⁴ "Will a Man Ever Learn" is a brooding plea — "I've been crying, girl, over you / 'Cause you've been lying, girl, / And I'm still in love with you / Now it looks like a man would learn" — backed with organ and horns (sax and trumpet). Stafford, his voice sliding into falsetto at times, gives a raw, gritty performance worthy of soul man Otis Redding.

In contrast, and accompanied by a string section, "Big in Dallas" is a restrained, matter-of-fact account of an aspiring singer's attempts to make a go of it in the big city. The young man's mother begs him not to go, but he is determined "to make it big in Dallas." He anticipates his name "up in lights" and standing ovations from audiences. Months later, after playing honky-tonks and dirty bars, the wannabe star is forced to admit, "I haven't gone too far in Dallas." His faith "is almost gone," but his dreams persist. "And tonight while I'm sleeping / I'll make it big in Dallas."

Stafford succinctly summarized the initial impact of the record. "It wasn't out long and didn't make any noise. But Buck Owens heard ["Big in Dallas"] somewhere and liked it."⁵⁵ Owens continues the story, "I was in Dallas doing a tour,



Born Losers album cover. Courtesy Joe W. Specht.



Terry Stafford "Big in Dallas" 45-rpm.
Courtesy Joe W. Specht.

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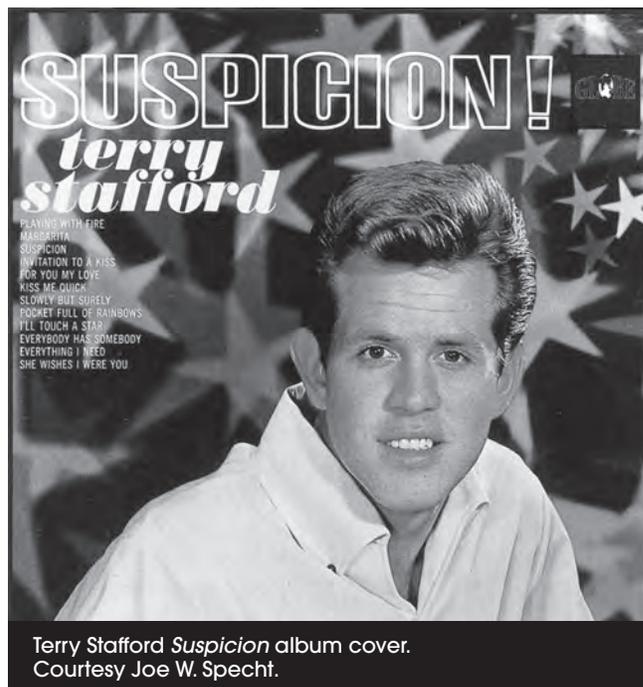
and I heard ... a song called 'Big in Dallas' [on the radio]. ... At the time, I was playing Las Vegas a lot and I thought, boy, I sure like that song. I wonder if I could change it around a little bit and call it 'Big in Vegas' cause, you know, you make it big in Dallas – that of course is nice, too – but people think if you've made it big in Vegas, you've really made it."⁵⁶ Owens contacted Stafford asking if he "could do a little re-writing," along with the title change, and Stafford agreed.⁵⁷ Owens shortened the song from three verses to two, omitting several lines, but the sense of stoic acceptance is unaltered.

Owens's studio version of "Big in Vegas" (Capitol 2646) climbed to Number 5 on *Billboard's Hot Country Singles* in December 1969.⁵⁸ A live version served as the title track of Owens's next album, *The Buck Owens Show Big in Vegas* (Capitol ST 413), and he performed "Big in Vegas" for a nationwide television audience on *The Ed Sullivan Show*.⁵⁹ According to Owens, it became one of his most requested songs. "If I was doing a show, I was going to be doing 'Big in Vegas' because my fans demanded it."⁶⁰ Appropriately enough on March 24, 2006, at his Crystal Palace music hall in Bakersfield, California, in what would be Owens's final appearance (he died in his sleep the next morning), "Big in Vegas" was the last song he sang.⁶¹

For Stafford, "[Big in Vegas] was my first successful hit as a writer," cause for those in the music industry to sit up and take notice again.⁶² Stafford and Owens received a 1970 BMI Citation of Achievement as logged by BMI for broadcast performances of the song.⁶³ Even though he had only changed

the title and condensed Stafford's lyrics, Owens, when commenting on the genealogy of "Big in Vegas," still seemed reluctant to give Stafford his due. "It was his idea," the head Buckaroo acknowledged, "and something that I enlarged upon. It worked out well for him because I'm sure it paid the rent one month."⁶⁴ The comment about one month's rent might seem flippant and certainly not literally true, but those who had business dealings with Buck Owens learned that he was a hardnosed negotiator when it came to allocating royalty percentages, which is apparently what happened in Stafford's case.⁶⁵ The encounter with Owens provided yet another reality check for Terry Stafford.

While Stafford had stopped touring, he continued to concentrate on songwriting and production. A friendship with Don Epperson developed when the two were filming *Wild Wheels*, and Stafford, inspired by the 1969 Paul Newman and Robert Redford western, furnished Epperson with the dramatic spoken-word "Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid" (Amaret 116, also Stateside 2C 006-91.586 M).⁶⁶ Bob Summers introduced Stafford to Don Perry, a trailblazer in the field of independent music supervision and concert promotion, and the singer "became a fixture" in the offices of Don Perry Enterprises.⁶⁷ The August 8, 1970, edition of *Billboard* reported, "Artist-writer Terry Stafford of 'Suspicion' fame is cutting an album for music production firm Don Perry Enterprises, Inc."⁶⁸ Stafford and Perry were set to co-produce, with Bob Summers arranging, for their own company Phonograph Records. However, the album was not forthcoming.



Terry Stafford *Suspicion* album cover.
Courtesy Joe W. Specht.

About the same time, Terry Stafford briefly set up his own label, Bronco, and produced Garland Frady's "Ft. Worth I Love You" b/w "Mr. Bojangles" (Bronco BJ 7112, also Paula P 1242).⁶⁹ Stafford continued to work with Bob Summers, and he oversaw a second single for Garland Frady, "When Mama Comes to Town" b/w "Bottle of Wine" (Broadway Records 45-9363) for Don Perry Enterprises.⁷⁰ "When Mama Comes to Town" is a Stafford original.

1971 is the year that Stafford, himself, returned to the studio. "I did a couple of singles for MGM ... produced by Bob Summers and Don Perry; they were part of an album we did that was never released."⁷¹ It proved to be yet another album project for naught. The two MGM 45s — "Mean Woman Blues-Candy Man" b/w "Chilly Chicago" (MGM K 14232) and "California Dancer" b/w "The Walk" (MGM K 14271) — did not chart either, but three of the four songs were Stafford compositions. "The Walk" is a gospel-infused number that follows Jesus and his ministry. "Nobody living today was there when he walked by the sea / But everybody knows that he walked for you and me." "California Dancer" is the standout, offering further evidence of Stafford's growth as a songwriter.

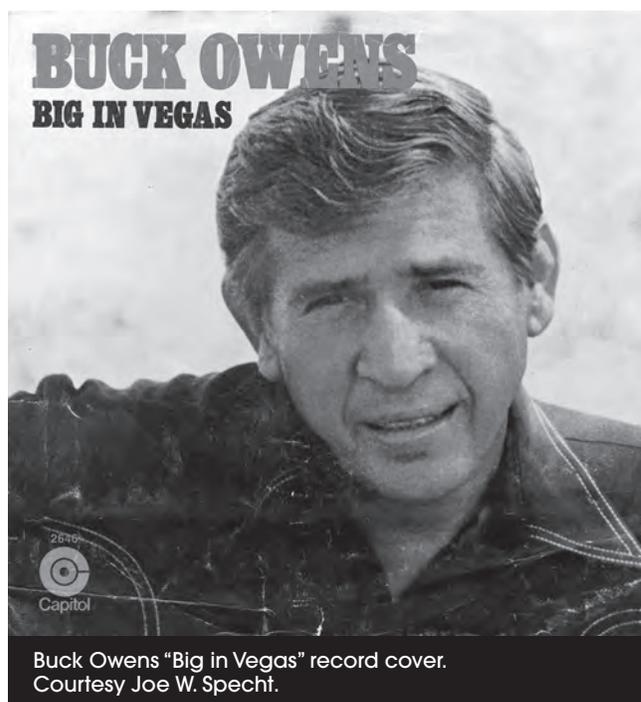
"California Dancer" continues the theme Stafford explored in "Big in Dallas." Follow your dreams, no matter what the obstacles. Persevere and the opportunity you need to succeed will surely follow. In "California Dancer," a young woman boards a Greyhound bus headed for the Golden State. Her goal is to become a professional dancer. "California dancer, she's got to make it all the way to the top / California dancer, until she does the girl won't stop." Our heroine runs out of money and takes a job at a go-go club waiting for "a big break to come along." She falls in with the wrong crowd, alcohol and drugs readily available. "Tune-in, turn-on California dancer / Smoked a hole in her hopes." Sitting alone in a run-down hotel, she ponders her fate, even as the singer concludes the song on a mantra-like vibe. "She's gonna make it / She's gonna make it."

In 1973, Stafford, with the support of John Fisher, now employed at Atlantic Records, signed with Atlantic's newly formed country music division.⁷² "1973 was the start of what I'd call my second career," Stafford later said to Robert Dalley. "I started getting really active as a performer again. I hadn't performed anywhere except for some local things for about seven years [and] I signed with Atlantic and went to Nashville and recorded an album."⁷³ The venerable R&B and jazz label opened an office in Music City in 1972; in addition to Stafford, Willie Nelson and John Prine were also on the roster.⁷⁴ Fisher asked Earl Poole Ball, formerly a producer for Capitol Records whom he had met in Los Angeles, to work with Stafford.⁷⁵

Although he modestly characterizes himself as "a rockabilly piano player and singer," Earl Poole Ball, Jr.'s musical pedigree includes West Coast session assignments with Buck Owens and the Buckaroos, Gram Parsons and the International Submarine Band, and the Byrds.⁷⁶ In Nashville, in addition to his work with Stafford, he produced albums for, among others, Freddie Hart and Johnny Cash. In 1977, Ball accepted an invitation from Cash, and for the next twenty years, he was the "go-to" piano player for the "Man in Black."⁷⁷

For the Stafford sessions, Ball assembled a troupe of "A-Team" musicians, including Lloyd Green (steel guitar), Charlie McCoy (harmonica, vibes, harpsichord), Hargus "Pig" Robbins (piano), and Tommy Allsup (tic-tac guitar). They all gathered at Jack Clement's recording studio, a.k.a. The Cowboy Arms Hotel and Recording Spa, in July 1973.⁷⁸ Prior to the first session, Ball and Stafford reviewed the list of thirteen songs the singer had selected to record. "Say, Has Anybody Seen My Sweet Gypsy Rose" and a remake of "Suspicion" were on the list, along with a co-write with his buddy Don Epperson, "Road House Country Singer." In a bit of serendipity, Stafford chose "Big in Vegas" not realizing that Ball was, in fact, the piano player on the Buck Owens recording.⁷⁹ In addition to these songs, Stafford selected "Amarillo by Morning," a song he had co-written with Paul Fraser.

Stafford crossed paths with Fraser, a self-described old rock and roller originally from Bend, Oregon, when Fraser settled in Los Angeles to escape the grind of touring.⁸⁰ The two began writing together, and one of their earliest efforts was "Amarillo



Buck Owens "Big in Vegas" record cover. Courtesy Joe W. Specht.

by Morning,” a song now most closely associated with country superstar George Strait. Strait’s MCA 45-rpm release (MCA 52162), a *Billboard* Top Five country hit in 1983, helped define the up-and-coming Texan’s musical path.⁸¹ The tune has since become a standard heard regularly on the national rodeo circuit and in dancehalls throughout Texas.

“Amarillo by Morning” is the laconic, late-night chronicle of a professional saddle bronc rider driving to the next gig at a county fair in Amarillo, Texas. “Amarillo by morning / Up from San Antone / Everything that I got / Is just what I’ve got on.” He is down on his luck without a saddle. Broke his leg in Santa Fe. His wife and a girlfriend have left him “somewhere along the way.” However, the rider has not given up. He is still “looking for eight [seconds] when they pull that gate,” which will put him back in the money. More importantly, he still has his pride. “I ain’t got a dime but what I got is mine

for airplay, and “Amarillo by Morning” was not among those listed.⁸⁵ To further compound the marketing oversight, Atlantic selected “Amarillo by Morning” as the B-side for “Say, Has Anybody Seen My Sweet Gypsy Rose” (Atlantic CY 4006), Stafford’s first Atlantic single and his initial entry on *Billboard’s Hot Country Singles* on August 25, 1973.⁸⁶ “Say, Has Anybody Seen My Sweet Gypsy Rose” climbed to Number 35, while the group Dawn, featuring Tony Orlando, scored a best seller with the very same song on *Billboard’s* pop chart.⁸⁷

The album entitled *Say, Has Anybody Seen My Sweet Gypsy Rose* (Atlantic SD 7282) received a glowing review in *Billboard*. “Stafford shows his abilities both as a writer and singer. It’s an unusually powerful selection of material, and as a singer there are few better.”⁸⁸ Sales soon received a further boost. Both *Billboard* and *Cash Box*, the other trade weekly of import, announced that Atlantic Records had decided to give

It is kind of funny, the song that had so much to do with bringing the Texas sound back was written by a couple of old rockers and inspired by a commercial.

/ I ain’t rich, but, Lord, I’m free.” Resolute, he pushes on in the darkness to Amarillo. Tinged with melancholy, “Amarillo by Morning,” like “Big in Dallas” and “California Dancer,” is further testament to Stafford’s never-wavering belief that the next break is just over the horizon.

As for the song’s origins, one story claims that Stafford hatched the idea on the drive back to Amarillo after performing at a rodeo dance in San Antonio.⁸² Paul Fraser’s account of the song’s genesis is a bit more mundane. “One night Terry called me at home. He had been watching television and a commercial for a delivery service had just run. It got him to thinking. This commercial guaranteed they could get your package to places like Amarillo by the next morning [and] he wanted to write a song around that concept.”⁸³ Fraser scribbled down some lines and took them to Stafford the next day. They refined the lyrics, and Stafford decided to cut the tune at his initial session for Atlantic Records. Fraser later remarked, after George Strait’s success, “It is kind of funny, the song that had so much to do with bringing the Texas sound back was written by a couple of old rockers and inspired by a commercial.”⁸⁴

Management at Atlantic Records failed to recognize the song’s potential, however. Promotional copies of the album sent to radio stations were stickered with suggested tracks

“A-side treatment” to “Amarillo by Morning” owing to “heavy radio response.”⁸⁹

In addition, *Cash Box* reported that, unbeknownst to the company, Jim Christofferson, the program director at Amarillo’s KDJW (1360 AM), had flipped the platter over and begun promoting the “Amarillo” side; moreover, local residents were so taken with the song that there was a “movement” to declare it the official city anthem.⁹⁰ Country Music Disc Jockey Hall of Fame member Dugg Collins, who became a close friend of Stafford, was also on the staff at KDJW. “Well, I can tell you the ‘A’ side of that record [“Sweet Gypsy Rose”] never saw the light of day with me and my radio station,” Collins affirmed.⁹¹ “Amarillo by Morning” premiered December 1, 1973, on *Billboard’s Hot Country Singles*, staying on the chart for fourteen weeks and reaching Number 31.⁹²

George Strait’s version, first released in 1982 on his second album, *Strait From the Heart* (MCA 5320), continues to receive the most widespread public recognition. Stafford and Fraser garnered a 1984 BMI Citation of Achievement awarded on the basis of broadcast performances of Strait’s recording.⁹³ In 2003, CMT (Country Music Television) solicited the voting members of the Country Music Association to select the “100 greatest songs of country music;” George Strait’s



George Strait "Amarillo By Morning" 45-rpm.
Courtesy Joe W. Specht.

version of "Amarillo by Morning" occupied the Number 12 slot.⁹⁴ Bill Friskics-Warren and David Cantwell ranked the song at 89 in *Heartaches by the Number: Country Music's 500 Greatest Singles*.⁹⁵ At the Country Music Association awards on November 6, 2013, with Strait sitting in the front row, hosts Brad Paisley and Carrie Underwood sang an "Amarillo by Morning" parody, "Obamacare by Morning," much to the amusement of the audience with Paisley acknowledging Strait's presence. "By the way, thank you, George Strait, I always loved ["Amarillo by Morning"]."⁹⁶

However, two years after Stafford's 1973 Atlantic debut, and seven years before Strait's recording, an actual rodeo cowboy was next out of the chute to record "Amarillo by Morning." Bareback-bronc riding champion Chris LeDoux included the song on his second self-released album, *Sings of His Life As a Rodeo Man* (Lucky Man 6520).⁹⁷ LeDoux sold his records and 8-track tapes via mail order and off the tailgate of his truck at arenas where he competed, further ensuring the song a musical niche within the rodeo and cowboy subculture.⁹⁸ In addition, prior to Strait's hit, several Texas performers had already found the song to their liking: Charlie Russell (1976), Terry Bullard (1980; produced by John Fisher), and Kelly Schoppa (1981).⁹⁹ After Strait's success, other Texans followed suit. Leon Rausch (1986), Clifton Jansky (1997), Moe Bandy (1997), the Light Crust Doughboys (2000), Asleep at the Wheel (2003), and John Arthur Martinez (2004) have all recorded renditions.¹⁰⁰ Martinez even sings a verse in Spanish featuring the accordion of Joel Guzmán. In Mexico, "Amarillo Por La Mañana"

garnered sales for Stafford's original, too.¹⁰¹

"Amarillo by Morning" resonates in other media, as well. Filmmaker Spike Jonze entitled his 1998 documentary short *Amarillo by Morning*. Shot during a rodeo in the Houston Astrodome, Jonze focuses his camera on a couple of would-be hopefuls aspiring to join the circuit.¹⁰² Screenwriter-producer-director Glen Stephens's novel, *Amarillo by Morning*, follows former world champion bull rider Richard "Stick" Slaton, who after twenty years on the sidelines attempts a comeback to earn enough money to pay for a kidney operation to save his nephew's life.¹⁰³ Contemporary romance novelists also have a sweet spot for the scenario. Bay Matthews, Bethany Campbell, and Jodi Thomas have each published an *Amarillo by Morning*.¹⁰⁴

Capitalizing on the positive response to "Amarillo by Morning" and "Say, Has Anybody Seen My Sweet Gypsy Rose," Atlantic Records released another two tunes from the *Sweet Gypsy Rose* album. "Captured," backed with a Stafford original, "It Sure Is Bad to Love Her" (Atlantic 4015), peaked at Number 24 on *Billboard's Hot Country Singles* on May 25, 1974.¹⁰⁵

Stafford reunited with Johnny Fortune, an associate from his Crusader Records days, and he used Fortune's band to begin touring again.¹⁰⁶ These public appearances received approving notices, too. *Billboard* columnist Bob Kirsch, who was in the audience at the Palomino Club in L.A., stated that "Terry Stafford [is] back as a country singer and, given a chance to do his own material, quite a commendable one. . . . Stafford's performance here was quite successful and he had little trouble winning over the Palomino crowd. With some material to call his own, he should have no difficulty retaining a solid foothold in the country field."¹⁰⁷ Stafford also secured an April 1974 booking to appear in the U.K. at the 6th International Festival of Country Music at Wembley Arena in London. Although it had been ten years since "Suspicion," the audience had not forgotten Terry Stafford. *Billboard* correspondent Bill Williams reported, "Newcomer Terry Stafford of Atlantic was another whose songs were recognized and heavily applauded."¹⁰⁸

The next month Stafford returned to Nashville and Jack Clement's Cowboy Arms Hotel and Recording Spa with Earl Poole Ball to begin work on a second album for Atlantic. Stafford again chose the songs. "Woman Sensuous Woman" had been a Number 1 hit for Don Gibson in 1972. "It's a Matter of Time" was the flipside of Elvis Presley's "Burning Love." There are three of Stafford's own, including "Chilly Chicago" (previously recorded for MGM), plus two collaborations with Paul Fraser, "Dang'd Ole Rodeo" and "Blue Goes with Anything," and one with Don Epperson, "Don't Knock It Till You've Cried It."¹⁰⁹ *We've Grown Close* (Atlantic SD 18105) was to be the title of the album.



The first single, “Stop If You Love Me” (Atlantic 4026), received the *Billboard* reviewer’s blessing. “A very smooth song and a sad but commercial story. It’s well produced and has all the necessary ingredients.”¹¹⁰ Necessary ingredients or not, in September, Atlantic Records announced the closing of its Nashville division with John Fisher in charge of “supervising the phase out of the office.”¹¹¹ Without proper promotion and company support, “Stop If You Love Me” stalled at Number 69 on the *Billboard* chart, lingering for a brief six weeks.¹¹² The move to shut down operations came as a surprise to many. “We weren’t expecting this,” said Earl Poole Ball.¹¹³ Stafford expressed obvious regret. “Atlantic was a great record company and I had just completed a new album that was due to be released before they folded.”¹¹⁴ After all of these years, *We’ve Grown Close* remains in the can, yet to see the light of day.

John Fisher’s industry contacts ran deep, however, and he reached out to associates at Motown Records, whom he met in Los Angeles when Berry Gordy relocated his headquarters from Detroit to the Sunset Strip in 1972.¹¹⁵ Motown was preparing to enter the country music market with a new imprint, Melodyland, and Fisher’s insider knowledge of Nashville meshed perfectly with the company’s needs. Fisher assumed the title of Coordinator of Melodyland Records with responsibilities for promotion, sales, and acquisition of new artists.¹¹⁶ He soon brought Terry Stafford into the fold. Mike Curb also furnished the new company with established performers Pat Boone, Ronnie Dove, and Jerry Naylor, each of whom was under contract to him.¹¹⁷

Stafford got back together with Earl Poole Ball to cut two songs, “Darling Think It Over” and “I Can’t Find It” (Melodyland ME 6009F).¹¹⁸ “Darling Think It Over” received a favorable review in the May 10, 1975, *Cash Box*. “Terry’s first release for Melodyland Records is produced by Earl Ball and already gaining airplay. ... Vocals are deep and rich and will help this one see more action regionally and nationally.”¹¹⁹ *Record World’s* “Country Hot Line” reported the single “is showing strong action in the southwest.”¹²⁰ Inexplicably, neither side made it into *Billboard’s Hot Country Singles*.

In the meantime, Mike Curb had another film project in the works, *Death Riders*, a documentary that follows the Death Riders Motorcycle and Auto Thrill Show as it barnstormed the countryside in the summer of 1974.¹²¹ Curb was in charge of the music, and he recruited several artists from the Melodyland roster (Dorsey Burnett, T.G. Sheppard, Pat Boone, Jerry Naylor, Kenny Seratt, and Stafford) for the soundtrack of songs penned by Porter Jordan and Jerry Styner. Stafford sings “Sunny Side Up” and “Sunshine Baby.” Director James Wilson blends the music with the action interjecting touches of sly humor along the way. For example, the barnstormers put on a show at a nudist colony, and during a motorcycle jump over a line of volunteers outstretched in the nude, “Sunny Side Up” can be heard over the action.

Lighthearted, yes, but in the interim, the powers-that-be at Melodyland decided not to issue a Stafford follow-up single — “She’s Out of Control” b/w “Reba,” again produced by Earl Poole Ball — which had already been assigned a release number (Melodyland ME 6022F).¹²² Even more troubling, Motown ditched the Melodyland moniker, and Stafford’s association with the organization ended, as well.¹²³ Once again an affiliation with a major company dissolved in frustration and unfulfilled expectations. From this point on, Terry Stafford worked only with independent labels based primarily in Nashville.

Without a record contract, Stafford turned to the road, still focusing on the country music audience. “In 1975, I got [another] band together, including Ron Griffith of the Lively Ones, and we toured Colorado and did local clubs. We had a decent sound, but something happened and the group folded.”¹²⁴ He booked himself as a solo act in clubs on the West Coast before resuming his partnership with Johnny Fortune. “[Johnny] traveled with me some and played guitar for me, and also acted as my musical director.”¹²⁵ Then it was on to the New England and Canadian circuits with the Don Mayberry Band.

Stafford did cut two tunes for Casino Records, a division of GRT (General Recorded Tape), the manufacturer of reel-to-reel, 8-track, and cassette tapes. Again produced by Earl Poole Ball, “It Sure Is Bad to Love Her” and “Don’t Knock It Till

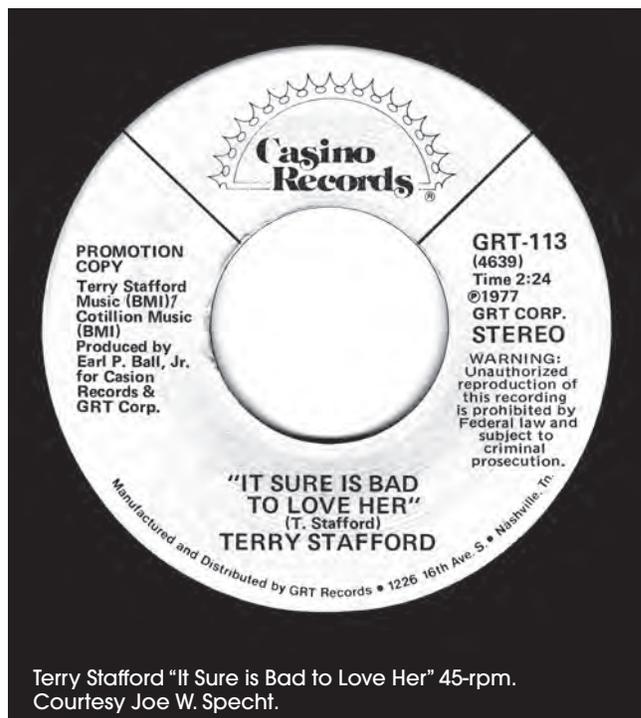
You've Cried It" (Casino GRT-113) are both Stafford originals. The former is a sparsely accompanied version of the same song included on the *Sweet Gypsy Rose* album; the latter, with the clever play-on-words title, is the co-write with Don Epperson previously intended for the unreleased Atlantic album.

"It Sure Is Bad to Love Her" is another of Stafford's reflections on a man who finds himself in a relationship with a woman who has the emotional upper hand. "She's different from any woman that I have ever known / And she can be so good to me when she wants to be but she don't / People always looking up to her while she's looking down on me." "It Sure Is Bad to Love Her" barely slipped onto *Billboard's Hot Country Singles* at Number 94 in March 1977.¹²⁶ "I never saw a copy," Stafford admitted.¹²⁷ It would be twelve years before a Stafford record again graced the *Billboard* country chart.

In the 1980 interview with Robert Dalley, Terry Stafford enthused about recently inking an agreement, once more initiated by John Fisher, with a new company, Frontline/Firstline Records. "After signing with Firstline, I went to Nashville in January of 1980 and recorded a real good album using Tammy Wynette's recording studio and top line Nashville session men. It should be out at any time now."¹²⁸ Two of the songs — "Everybody Loves a Love Song" and "Texas Moon Palace," a Stafford composition — are paired on a 45 (Firstline FLS-710). "Texas Moon Palace" is a feel-good tip of the hat to the Lone Star State. "So shine on while they're playing our song / We heard it in Houston and Dallas / But we'll spend the night where the feeling is right / Here at the Texas Moon Palace." The single went unnoticed; as for the Firstline album, it never appeared.

Stafford stayed on the road eschewing, for the most part, the nostalgia circuit. "I never booked myself on any 'oldies and goodies' shows," he told Robert Dalley, "because I feel my career has been progressing."¹²⁹ However, he did keep "Suspicion" in his set list much to the delight of live audiences. "I love 'Suspicion;' it was the most exciting thing in my life. There is nothing to compare to having your first hit record, especially at the age I was."¹³⁰ In a revealing aside, Stafford confessed, "It is more fun to sing now than it was back in 1964. I don't feel the pressure now as I did when it was a hit. It was hard to live up to a #1 record."¹³¹

During this period, Stafford's recording activities were intermittent. It is unclear why he decided to wax a couple of gospel numbers in 1983 for little known Eastland Records. With Bob Summers occupying the producer's chair, Stafford cut "(Lord, Can You and Me Get) Back Together" and "Life's Railway to Heaven" (Eastland ERS 101). "Life's Railway to Heaven" is the venerable nineteenth-century standard. "(Lord Can You and Me Get) Back Together" is one of Stafford's



Terry Stafford "It Sure is Bad to Love Her" 45-rpm. Courtesy Joe W. Specht.

own. "Lord, can you and me get back together / Can I talk to you like I did when I was young / Or has it been too long since we've been together / Or can I still get some help from someone." It was around this time that Earl Poole Ball encountered Stafford at Nudie's Rodeo Tailors in North Hollywood, and the two reminisced about their Nashville experiences. According to Ball, "He was [modestly upbeat] ... still the same Terry I knew."¹³²

John Fisher's belief in Stafford's abilities never wavered, either. Stafford also valued his relationship with Fisher. "It seems that most of the success I have had as a singer has been because of John Fisher's involvement with my career."¹³³ In 1985, the two again joined forces at Fisher's Fish-Wing Music Enterprises. A Fish-Wing press communiqué proclaimed, "TERRY STAFFORD Now Ready To Tour Texas;" furthermore, "Nashville record producer John Fisher is hot with a new single on recording artist Terry Stafford 'Deja Vu' on Player International Records."¹³⁴ "Deja Vu" is a Stafford original, and the flipside is a re-recording of "Texas Moon Palace" (Player International P1-113).¹³⁵ This record was the first of four Stafford 45s to be issued by the company over the next four years.

"Love's Been Hell on Me" b/w "Long Haul Fever" (Player International P1-115), released the same year, was next.¹³⁶ "Love's Been Hell on Me" was written by Jack Strong, and the subject matter — another man-woman romance gone awry — is a familiar one to the Stafford song bag. "Long Haul Fever" is Stafford's contribution to the truck driving school of



Terry Stafford "Lonestar Lonesome" 45-rpm.
Courtesy Larry Blevins.

country music. "Two weeks on the road I ain't had much rest / Trucking is my life and I try to do my best."

While promoting "Love's Been Hell on Me," Stafford guested on *Nashville Now*, the live, nightly television variety show hosted by Ralph Emery on the *Nashville Network*. Minnie Pearl and Loretta Lynn, sitting in for Emery, engaged Stafford in conversation, and his innate shyness and humility was readily apparent. Twenty-one years after the Dick Clark interview(s) on *American Bandstand*, Stafford, now a seasoned professional, was obviously still self-conscious in the spotlight, that is until he stood in front of the microphone, where he sang a poised "Love's Been Hell on Me" and a poignant "Amarillo by Morning."¹³⁷

John Fisher was also recording demos for independent songwriters, record labels, and publishing companies, and he often had Stafford lay down the vocal tracks when the singer was in Nashville. In 2010, ten of these collaborations surfaced on Terry Stafford's *From Out of the Past* (Dorsey Recording 1051).¹³⁸ "Love's Been Hell on Me" was one of the songs. Two others, Lyle H. Austin's "They're Growing Grass in the Old Cornfield" and Jack Smart and Lynn Dorvall Smith's "Strangers with the Same Last Name," comprised Stafford's third Player International 45 (Player International P1-125).¹³⁹ Even though his records attracted little attention, Stafford remained in the public eye. He performed on the syndicated television show *Solid Gold* in an episode that aired in January 1987. Stafford sang "Suspicion" in the Flashback segment.¹⁴⁰

On February 18, 1989, after a dozen-year hiatus, Stafford

reappeared on *Billboard's Hot Country Singles* with "Lonestar Lonesome" (Player International P1-134).¹⁴¹ It hovered at the bottom of the rankings for three weeks, topping out at Number 89. The flipside, "Falling (It's a Long Long Way from Hollis, Oklahoma)," is one of Stafford's compositions. "Lonestar Lonesome," co-written by Steven Stone and John Cunningham, is Stafford's swan song on the *Billboard* chart.

The narrator of "Lonestar Lonesome" is recently arrived in Los Angeles, and he has already had to accept the fact that "I may be new in town but I've been around just long enough to find / There ain't a thing in L.A. to ease this cowboy's mind." Sitting alone in a bar after one drink too many, the woman he left behind in Houston weighs heavily on his mind. "There's a love song on the jukebox just like in Texas / But, girl, there's no one here just like you ... And I'm Lonestar lonesome tonight." Perhaps Stafford chose "Lonestar Lonesome" because Stone and Cunningham's lyrics reminded him of his own arrival in the City of Angels nearly thirty years earlier.

There's no missing the autobiographical flavor of "Falling (It's a Long Long Way from Hollis, Oklahoma)." First, of course, is the reference to Hollis, Oklahoma, the town where Stafford was born. Then there is the storyline; a young man heads to California "to do some playing ... searching for gold." He meets a woman, who takes him "to her world high on a mountain / Somewhere above Hollywood town." The singer soon realizes he's out of his element. "It's a long, long way from Hollis, Oklahoma / To the top of the Hollywood hills / Her love let me drop to the bottom from the top / And the fall



Terry Stafford "Falling" 45-rpm. Courtesy Joe W. Specht.



Terry Stafford "California Dancer" 45-rpm. Courtesy Larry Blevins.

is hurting me still." He finds neither "gold" nor love. "And if I had a ride I'd be leaving this morning / Back home to those Oklahoma hills."

"Lonestar Lonesome" and "Falling" are indications that Stafford's thoughts were increasingly turning to home. In fact, he regularly came back to the Lone Star State to see his family and friends. In a 1973 interview with *Globe-Times* staff writer George Turner, Stafford proudly acknowledged, "Amarillo always looks beautiful to me, whether it's windy or not."¹⁴² Dugg Collins maintained that "had the music opportunities been available in Amarillo that awaited him in Los Angeles, I know he would have never left. Getting back home, even for just a short visit, was always on his mind. He loved Amarillo, Texas."¹⁴³

In the summer of 1995, Stafford returned to Amarillo for what proved to be the final time. He had been battling liver and kidney ailments for four years, but he was excited about a potential record deal with a company in Dallas.¹⁴⁴ Sadly, during the next several months, Stafford's condition continued to worsen. Hospitalized and placed on a respirator in intensive care, he received few visitors. Dugg Collins would not be denied entrance, however, and he describes their poignant hospital parting. "I said ... 'Terry, I know you can't speak with that thing in your throat, but just wiggle your fingers to let Ol' Dugg know that you know I came to see you.'"¹⁴⁵ Stafford wiggled his fingers. Collins put his friend's hand down on the bed and left the room. Terry Stafford, age 54, died a few days later on March 17, 1996. He is buried in the city's Llano Cemetery.¹⁴⁶

Success in the entertainment business requires heart, smarts, guts, and luck. Of these requisites, Stafford most certainly had the first three. When asked about the twists and turns in his career, he was straightforward in his reply. "I can't put my finger on any certain thing that might have hurt my career, but the music industry changed directions at the time 'Suspicion' was out and I do think the Beatles and British Invasion on the national music scene affected my career some, as it probably did other American performers at the time."¹⁴⁷ Then there were the problems at Crusader Records, which turned out to be a harbinger of what lay ahead: companies shutting down, albums going unreleased, and one-shot record deals. Yet, through all the peaks and valleys, Stafford attempted to maintain a positive attitude, albeit imbued with a stoic acceptance of the vicissitudes of the business itself. Witness the songs he wrote that fit this frame of mind: "Big in Dallas," "California Dancer," and "Amarillo by Morning."

Stafford did not alter his singing style, either. The smooth delivery and the subtle inflections allowed him to appeal to both pop and country music audiences. "To me, he was always [a superlative] ballad singer," Manassas, Virginia, musicologist Larry Blevins sums up. "Terry's voice blended Southern-roots heritage with cowboy-at-heart Texas soul."¹⁴⁸ Stafford's personality and temperament were also constants. As Dugg Collins stated, "I will always remember him for his great talent and his easygoing manner, almost to the point of being shy. ... Never did see Terry get upset about anything. ... There was never an ounce of ego in the man's makeup."¹⁴⁹ Earl Poole Ball concurs. "He was a shy and sensitive man. ... I never saw a big laugh or guffaw, maybe a slight smile now and then. ... He was understated like someone who always has something in the back of his mind."¹⁵⁰ Don Perry agreed. "[Terry] was a very down to earth guy and more talented than he realized. ... The music



Terry Stafford headstone. Photo by and courtesy of Joe W. Specht.

world saw glimpses of his talent. Those of us who worked with him every day knew it was the tip of the iceberg.”¹⁵¹

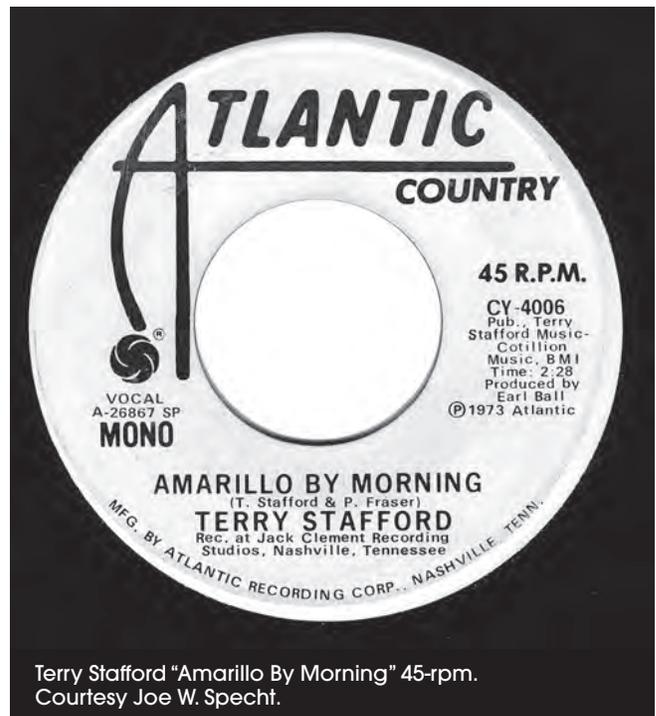
Don Perry offered this further insight. “After his ordeal with Crusader, it was hard to earn his trust. ... In some ways, Terry was his own worst enemy. He wrote some great songs, but he never wanted to turn them over to major publishing

weigh on him. That said, while some persist in pigeonholing Stafford as a one-hit wonder, it should also be evident that he continually proved himself as both singer and songwriter. If he never got the next big break his talents deserved, Terry Stafford’s musical legacy endures: *Amarillo by morning*, *Amarillo is where I’ll be.*★

After his ordeal with Crusader, it was hard to earn his trust. ... In some ways, Terry was his own worst enemy. He wrote some great songs, but he never wanted to turn them over to major publishing companies to pitch to other artists.

companies to pitch to other artists. ... I believe he could have been one of the most successful country writer/artists in the business if he had trusted a few more people.”¹⁵² In a bit of irony, then, Stafford’s own *suspicion* could well have contributed to a professional life strewn with setbacks.

As for “Suspicion,” Stafford understood that for many listeners the song would always define his career. However, as he made clear, “I do not regard myself as an oldie. ... I still perform ‘Suspicion,’ but I do not want to be stereotyped into a position where that is the only song I can do.”¹⁵³ Still, the interminable burden of being identified with the song had to



Terry Stafford “Amarillo By Morning” 45-rpm.
Courtesy Joe W. Specht.

Notes

- 1 Portions of this paper were presented at the annual meeting of the West Texas Historical Association held in Amarillo on April 11, 2015. A special thanks to Larry Blevins, a longtime fan of Terry Stafford and aficionado of his music. Larry provided rare recordings of Stafford, personal correspondence with the singer and other associates, along with steadfast support for the project. *Praguefrank's Country Music Discographies* (<http://countrydiscography.blogspot.com/terry-stafford/>) and *Terry Stafford 'Suspicion' Home Page* (<http://keepkey.yochanan.net/terry>) are essential sources for following Terry Stafford's recording career. For additional input and suggestions, a tip of the hat to Earl Poole Ball, Jr., David Coffey, Dugg Collins, Sam Jones, Melody Kelly, Justin Lemmons, Jack Pierce, Mike Pierce, Tyler Stoddard Smith, Mary Helen Specht, and Andy Wilkinson.
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