

# BOB LUMAN AND FRIENDS FLASHBACKS AND SENSIBILITIES

Photos by Libby Leverett

By Bill Littleton

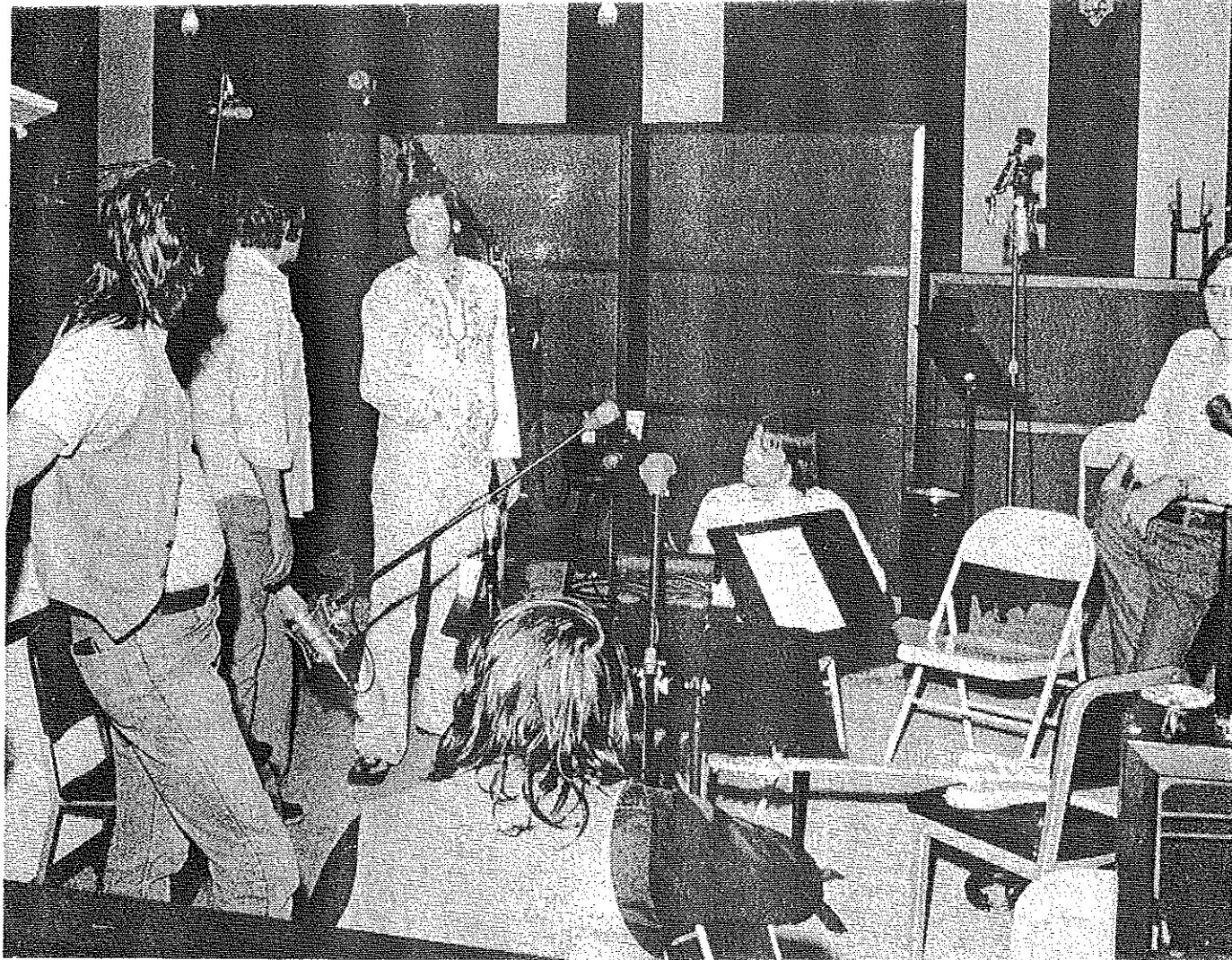


There were a couple of other things to do that afternoon, but when Bob Luman and Johnny Cash invite you to a recording session, other things dim in terms of urgency.

Bob was understandably happy about this new album, his first to be produced by long-time friend and neighbor Cash, as well as his first recording since a serious illness

resulting from the rupture of a blood vessel in his throat.

The mood was memorable. I had come by way of Goodlettsville to pick up young whiz photographer Libby



Leverett just moments after she got home from school, and she showed me a shortcut down a meandering country road to Gallatin Pike, Hendersonville, and the House of Cash. We walked in during a take — Bob was singing "Big River" and John played rhythm, while a guitar man with familiar looking hair and his back toward us played another flattop, all surrounded by other musicians — and took a comfortable seat on a sofa overlooking the sunken area of the huge room (the Cash studio was originally an in - round theatre). During a guitar break that hauntingly recalled legends of Luther Perkins, Bob waved to me, winked at Libby, and got back to his singing.

At the end of the take, everyone huddled around Cash, who wanted to expand the mood of the song some. "I wrote it as a blues," he said, chugging out some open - chord licks on the guitar and wailing the first two lines harder than most people ever heard Johnny sing. "In fact," he added, stopping the song mid-verse, "I wrote it for Elvis; he asked me to write him a song and I took it up to

Sun to put it down, and Sam made me cut it."

So it went all afternoon — Fifties' flashbacks and Seventies' sensibilities. Here were folks who went way back but have their feet planted firmly in the present.

At some point before Libby got her camera unpacked, the hidden guitar picker stood up and revealed himself to be Waylon Jennings; the two guys playing electric were Rip Wilson of Luman's Stones River Band and Paul Yandell, mostly known for his backup work with Jerry Reed and Chet Atkins. Jack Routh played John's guitar on a song or two that John sat out in the control room, and Steve Wairner, Robby Leebrick, and Mike Shrimps of Bob's band filled out the rest of the pickers.

Later in the same session, after a good original ballad in the gist of latter-day Luman, the crew got back into Cashology, doing a version of "Hey Porter" that I'm anxious to hear when the album comes out. "I'll sing a verse, Paul, and then you pick one and then I'll sing one, and then you pick and then I'll sing the last one," Bob replied to a question concerning

the rundown of the song. "You want him to pick the same thing both times?" Cash queried. "That's the way Luther did it," Bob answered.

John didn't say anything to that, but when the cut was finished and the playback was tumbling out of the big speakers, he announced, "We need to add something to keep you from getting bogged down in my old sound." After a thoughtful moment Bob agreed, and the "something" turned out to be some banjo-type licks Paul overdubbed on an electric gutstring guitar.

A perfect blend of old and new.

At another point in the session, Cash walked up from the work area to the opposite end of our sofa, where he knelt to a flat box and proceeded to load and prime what I later learned to be an 1851 model .55-cal. cap - and - ball dueling pistol, all the while grinning to himself like the only kid in the class who knew what the teacher was gonna ask on the test. When the gun was ready (with a slugless charge, of course) and the playback nearly ended, back to the center of things ambled Johnny Cash, holding the long pistol

down by his leg to aid the surprise element of "Boom" when the music stopped.

Almost as if on cue from the pistol shot, the door opened for June and John Carter to lead a cluster of friends into the studio. "My goodness," she exclaimed, "Sounds like y'all are having a fun time." The visit was brief, but it gave John Carter plenty of time to explore the work area, being led away with "John Carter, we're leaving. No, son, you have your drums at home."

Back to the music — it was lovely. Waylon grinned like a kid with a new bike, and John took all the time anything needed, spicing his

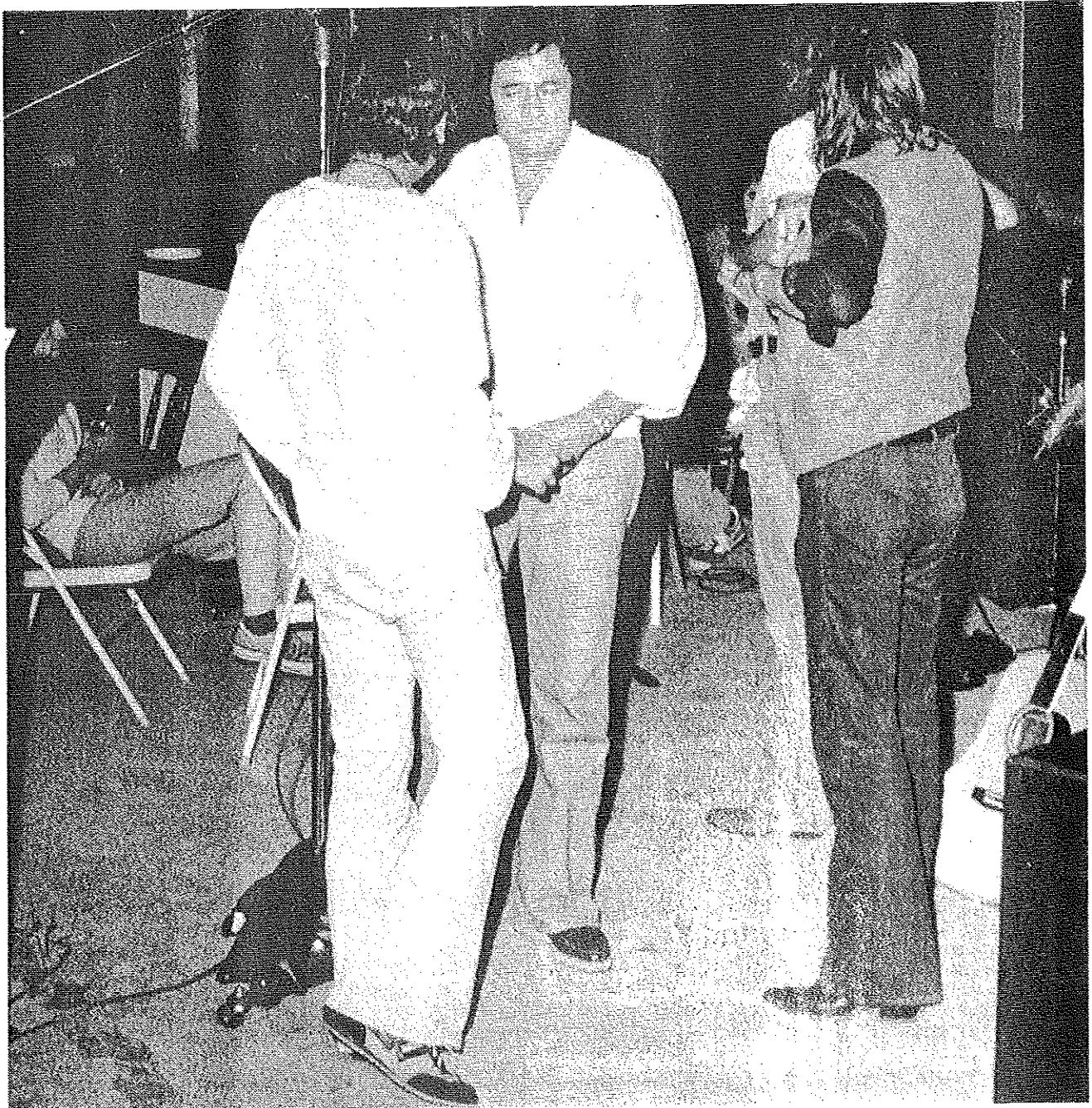
comments from the control room with such tidbits as "I wanta hear some Luman" and "Tempo, children, let's get that tempo!"

Luman? Well, he's something all his own. He was obviously grateful for Cash's involvement and for Waylon's "excuse for getting out of the office for an afternoon," but no one questioned the value of what they were doing because of their respect for Bob's artistry.

Typical of the joviality was Waylon's request for a cigarette while he overdubbed some tenor harmony on "Big River." "Can you smoke menthol?" somebody hollered. "I'd smoke a pickle,"

declared Ole Waylon, "if it wasn't so soggy and hard to light."

In fact, the only negative aspect of the afternoon happened to my young photographer friend. Libby had several exposures left on a roll of film when she started shooting, with which she got the accompanying picture of Bob, John and Waylon talking in the studio. She then put a new roll in, but the turning mechanism failed, putting all those super close-ups and angles on one little patch of film. Therefore, you won't get to see the session quite the way Libby saw it, but you can believe she'll never forget what she saw. **●CSR**



Bob and Johnny listen intently while Ole Waylon gets ready to light up another one.