



THE TIME

You go see your favorite stars perform—your favorite stars, including Vince Gill and Reba McEntire, go see *this* group perform! **STORY BY KIP KIRBY**

When The Time Jumpers hit the stage every Monday night at the Station Inn in Nashville, it's difficult to tell who's having more fun—the audience or the band. And it's always a toss-up as to whether there are more famous faces in the audience or on the tiny stage, where 11 A-team session players are packed in elbow-to-elbow, playing everything from Western swing, jazz and big-band music to country standards and cowboy classics.

They've been called "the band the stars come out to see." So strong is the buzz around The Time Jumpers, in fact, that it's not unusual to see celebrities like Vince Gill, Bonnie Raitt, Reba McEntire, Jimmy Buffett, Sheryl Crow, Robert

Plant or Alison Krauss listening and singing along until they can't resist jumping onstage themselves for a number or two.

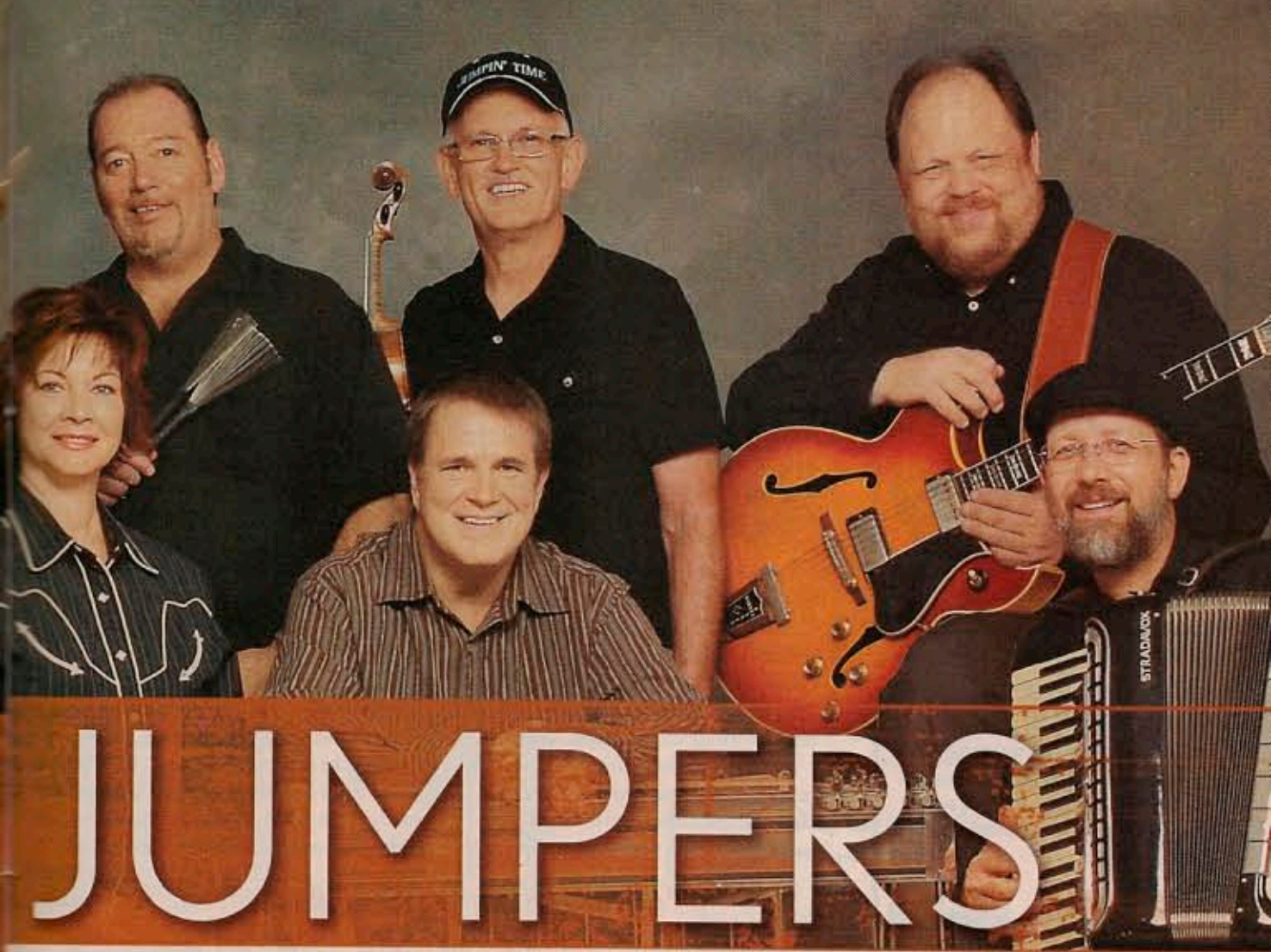
"They let me sit in and they give me a few dollars," jokes Vince Gill, "and that takes me to the Waffle House. But even on nights when I'm not playing, I just love going there, sitting at a table with everyone else in the audience, and listening to some of the best music you'll hear anywhere in the world. You can't beat it."

OK, you may not recognize The Time

Jumpers, but you've heard their talents on countless hit records and top-selling tours. Now it's their turn in the spotlight.

The group actually got its start a decade ago when founding member Dennis Crouch and a couple of friends booked themselves around Nashville as The Time Jumpers, but it wasn't until their now-legendary musical jam sessions broke out backstage every Friday and Saturday night at the Grand Ole Opry that the group really picked up steam.

"Three of us were in Jimmy C. Newman's band at the time, and pickin' in our dressing room just seemed like a good way to pass the time," recalls bandleader Kenny Sears. "Other musicians would stick their heads in the door to listen or grab their instruments and join in. Many nights, the liveliest



JUMPERS

show at the Opry wasn't the one on the stage but the one coming from Dressing Room Number 6 backstage!"

"Sometimes they'd even come by and tell us to close our damn dressing room door because there was too much music going on," laughs Time Jumper "Ranger Doug" Green.

Stoked by what was happening, the musicians talked the Station Inn into letting them set up shop on Monday nights when the club was usually closed. Their audiences were small at first, but The Time Jumpers didn't mind. They were having far too much fun onstage tossing solos back and forth, surprising each other with new licks and fills, and coming up with inventive arrangements to worry about the size of the crowd. "It was a creative release for us," explains lead guitarist Andy Reiss. "After spending all day in the studio, we got to play what we wanted to play with the best musicians in Nashville."

The Time Jumpers: (from left) Dennis Crouch, Aubrey Haynie, "Ranger Doug" Green, Carolyn Martin, Kenny Sears, Dawn Sears, Rick Vanaugh, Paul Franklin, Joe Spivey, Andy Reiss and Jeff Taylor

These days, slow Monday nights at the Station Inn are a thing of the past. If you want a seat at a Time Jumpers show, you'd better get there early. The audience is packed with fans of Western swing, traditional country music, and dusted-off classics brilliantly played by bassist Dennis Crouch (the only remaining original member), acoustic rhythm guitarist "Ranger Doug" Green, fiddlers Aubrey Haynie, Kenny Sears and Joe Spivey, lead elec-

tric guitarist Andy Reiss, accordionist Jeff Taylor, drummer Rick Vanaugh, lead vocalists Carolyn Martin and Dawn Sears, and the newest member of the band, steel guitarist Paul Franklin.

"I introduce the band each Monday night by saying, 'We're The Time Jumpers, and we play timeless music,'" says Kenny Sears. "Everything we do is familiar, and most of the songs were hits. We stick to the swing era, 4/4 country shuffles and music that has its roots in the classics. I think the reason we appeal to so many people is that we're choosing songs from the cream of the crop of the last 100 years or so."

The Time Jumpers will tell you that they're not reinventing the wheel—they're simply reviving deserving traditional tunes whose roots run deep but

"We're choosing from the cream of the crop."



Onstage in Nashville with guest performer Vince Gill singing

THE TIME JUMPERS CONTINUED are too often overlooked these days. Still, their appeal comes from their rollicking arrangements and the sheer joy they get from playing together. Says Joe Spivey, "I can't wait to hear what the next guy's gonna play."

"The heart of our music is the music Bob Wills played and musicians like Spade Cooley followed, but this is no museum band," says "Ranger Doug" Green (who moonlights from his regular gig with Riders in the Sky). "Each person brings their unique talents."

With new manager Terry Choate at the helm, the band released a live album recorded at the Station Inn during a regular Monday night performance. The criti-

"We're each other's biggest cheerleaders," explains Jeff Taylor. "We really get off on hearing each other play." Says Paul Franklin, the newest member of The Time Jumpers (he replaced longtime steel guitarist John Hughey, who died unexpectedly in late 2007), "I joined the band last December, and these guys still surprise me. I'll think I know all the songs we're going to play, and then someone will pull out a new one onstage."

Individually, The Time Jumpers have all performed on award-winning records, soundtracks and tours. Paul and Aubrey have both won Musicians of the Year honors from the ACM. They all hold down prestigious music jobs. Dawn Sears is a

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cally acclaimed 26-song, two-disc CD, *Jumpin' Time*, promptly stunned everyone by earning two Grammy nominations this year: Best Country Performance by a Duo or Group with Vocals (featuring Jumper vocalist Dawn Sears' achingly pure rendition of "Sweet Memories") and Best Country Instrumental Performance (for "Fidoodlin").

"To get not one but two Grammy nominations without a major record label behind us—it's unheard of," says "Ranger Doug." "I knew we had a lot of support in the industry, but we never dreamed we'd make the final ballot. We were as starry-eyed as 15-year-olds when we found out."

Several Jumpers attended the Grammy Awards in Los Angeles, which were held on a Sunday night, the next day, they flew back to Nashville (empty-handed) and were onstage as usual that night for their weekly gig.

longtime member of Vince Gill's band, Dennis Crouch tours with Robert Plant and Alison Krauss, and Joe Spivey plays in John Anderson's band.

In February, The Time Jumpers came full circle when they were asked to headline at the Grand Ole Opry. "All of us have played the Opry at one time or another with performers we were working with," says Carolyn Martin. "But to play the Opry together as The Time Jumpers was an incredible experience."

Now, with Grammy nominations, a public television concert special, a growing international fan base and three CDs (plus a live-performance DVD available through their website, thetimejumpers.com), the band wonders if the sky's the limit. "We used to outnumber the crowd," laughs Jeff Taylor. "Now the crowd outnumbers us." **CW**