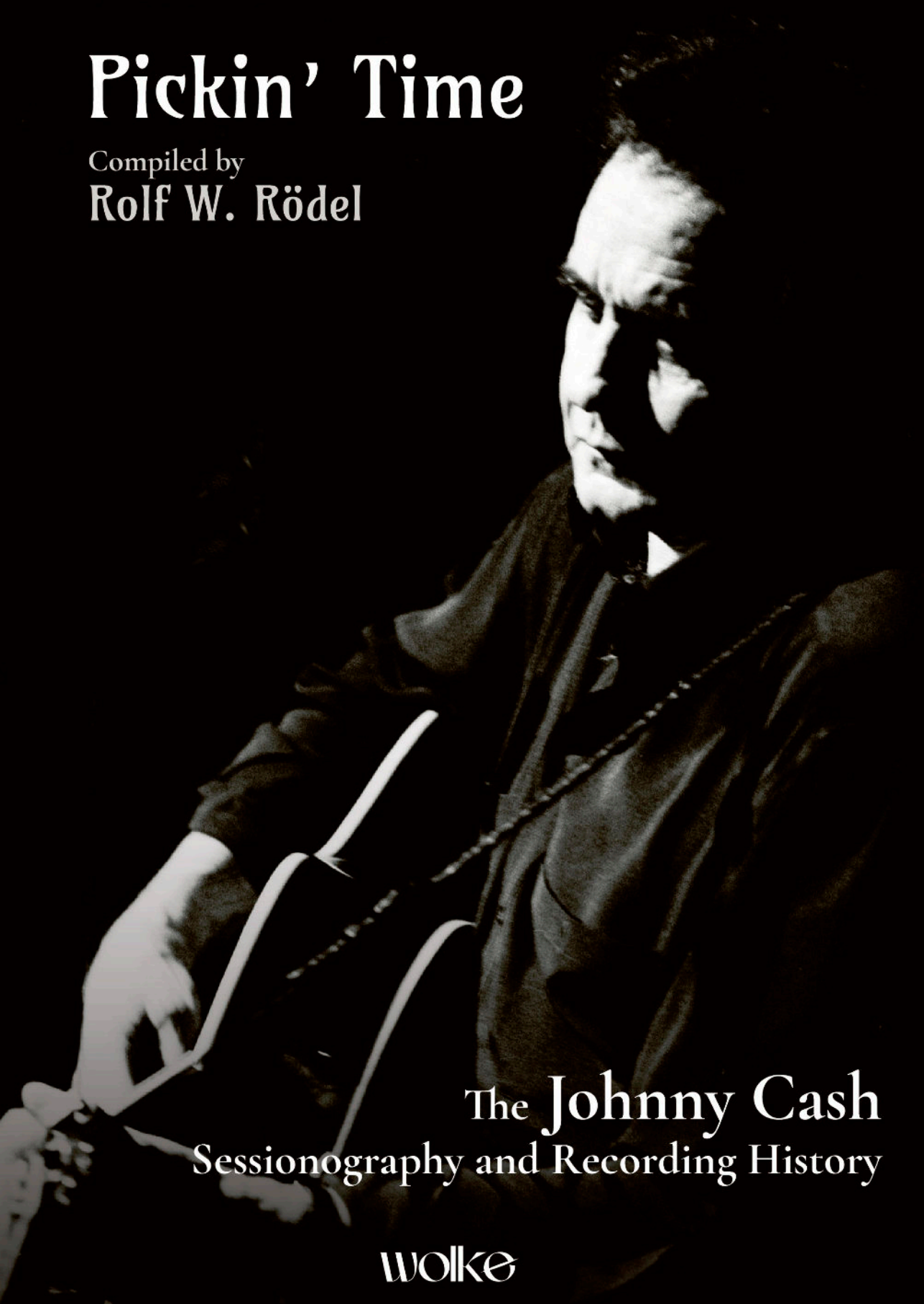


Pickin' Time

Compiled by

Rolf W. Rödel



The Johnny Cash
Sessionography and Recording History

wolke

Rolf W. Rödel

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and Recording History

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Wolke Verlag, Berlin, 2026
Cover design: Dimana Vodenicharska, Berlin / Wolke Verlag
ISBN 978-3-95593-650-1 (PDF)
ISBN 978-3-95593-633-4 (Print)
www.wolke-verlag.de

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DEDICATION

This book is respectfully dedicated to
John L. Smith
and
to all the artists, musicians and producers listed in this book.

WORDS FROM JOANNE CASH YATES

In the early stages of this project, I had the honor of receiving a few personal words from Johnny Cash's sister, Joanne Cash Yates. Her heartfelt message speaks from within the family and offers a deeply personal perspective on her brother's life and spiritual journey. I am grateful to include it here.

I see you have done quite a bit of research on my brother Johnny Cash. All the sessions, times, musicians, and places that he recorded, that are too innumerable to mention, can be of value to many people.

To me, this is his story, in his own words that you are quoting, which makes it so much more believable. The incredible life that he lived with all the mountains and valleys, from the depths of sickness, drugs, and near—very near—death experiences, made him want to end it all, but God had a much greater plan for his life.

Yes, there is life after drugs! Jesus is that answer, not only for Johnny, but for anyone. His life and the right choice brought him upward on the path to be an example to the whole world concerning honesty, faith, and truth.

He showed us how to overcome through grace and mercy of God. I miss him!

— Joanne Cash Yates

INTRODUCTION

Johnny Cash is among the most important and popular American music artists of the twentieth century with more than 90 million records sold worldwide. Recognizable by his strong, deep, and warm bass-baritone voice and the unique boom-chicka-boom rhythm sound by his band, the Tennessee Two (later the Tennessee Three), his repertoire as singer and songwriter embraced genres ranging from mainly country to rock and roll, rockabilly, blues, folk, and gospel. His career began in 1954 at Sam Phillips' Sun Records, the legendary label that launched several pioneers of rock and roll and country, where he recorded hits like *I Walk The Line* and *Folsom Prison Blues*. In 1958 he moved to Columbia Records achieving stardom for almost three decades, and during which he recorded, among others, his famous prison albums. After a few years with Mercury Records, he revitalized his career in collaboration with producer Rick Rubin and the American Recordings series launched in the 1990s. This partnership introduced him to a new generation of listeners, marking Cash's resurgence as a cultural and musical icon. In a musical career spanning almost fifty years, Cash recorded more than 1,800 songs including numerous chart-topping hits. Most of his recordings were released through the years on more than eighty official albums and on numerous compilations of his greatest successes that are still available today. However, there also remain many songs and alternative takes that, to this day, have never been released.

The present book deals specifically with his recordings and the questions of how, when and where all these songs were recorded. It covers Johnny Cash's entire career, from the first recordings at Sun Studios in Memphis in 1954 to his last session in his own recording studio shortly before his death in 2003. In the past there have been a few publications that have seriously addressed this theme, but only for specific periods of time. Discographer John L. Smith's books from the 1980s and 1990s certainly count as references, as do the research and publications by Martin Hawkins and Colin Escott on the Sun period, and by Richard Weize on the early Columbia Records period. This also includes the detailed information from the booklets accompanying the LP/CD boxes from Charly Records and Bear Family Records released in the 1980s and 1990s.

Having gathered recording data of Johnny Cash over the years, I contacted John L. Smith in 2007 and offered him my support as we were both busy updating our records and data on the Johnny Cash recordings. The result was a great and trusting one-and-a-half-year collaboration through a lively exchange of information and recording dates, which unfortunately ended abruptly with Smith's death in 2009. Initially, further work and research was carried out for my own needs and only after a few months did the idea arise to bundle the available material in a book and to publish it.

This book is the result of more than eighteen years of research and analysis, based primarily on documents from the Country Music Hall of Fame & Museum in Nashville and the American Federation of Musicians (AFM) in Nashville and in Hollywood. In addition, valuable information was considered from correspondence with some singers, musicians and people from the music industry who were willing to help and support the project. Unfortunately, inquiries to other bodies were less successful. Documents from the AFM in New York, the House of Cash, the music companies and the SAG-AFTRA (Screen Actors Guild - American Federation of Television and Radio Artists) could not, with few exceptions, be considered for this book, but these sources might have clarified some ambiguities and unresolved questions. Nonetheless, the abundance of available documentation and data made it possible to detail almost all of Johnny Cash's studio recording sessions since the 1970s. Recording documents prior to 1970, except for a few recordings from California, were unfortunately no longer available because they were removed from the archives and destroyed years ago. The recording sessions up to 1969 detailed in this book are essentially based on the works and publications by John L. Smith, Martin Hawkins, Colin Escott and Richard Weize cited above, but for which it was possible to add or correct some data from this period.

However, there are still many gaps where documentation and data could not be found, both for regular and overdub sessions. Unfortunately, one must assume that much of this missing data may no longer be found. In some cases, data was available for overdub sessions but not for the first regular session and this made sorting particularly difficult. A particular challenge when analyzing and comparing documents was the recurring conflicting information, and where the content did not always correspond to the facts. In such cases it was necessary to make the most plausible assumptions as a compromise. The documents available from the AFM showed the presence of the musicians in the studios, but the singers were not or only rarely indicated. If Johnny Cash's presence could be sorted out to some extent in most cases, it was more difficult with the backing singers (June Carter Cash, the Carter Family), especially the choruses. Any assumptions were noted in footnotes.

This book contains around 1400 studio recording sessions, including the overdub and demo sessions. In addition, around 120 selected live shows, as well as some radio and TV shows, are included if they were, with a few exceptions, officially released in whole or in part. These shows include the legendary Folsom and San Quentin prison concerts, the ABC TV show from 1969 to 1971, the 1970 White House concert and his final appearances on the Carter Family Fold in 2003. Numerous releases on singles, cassette tapes, LPs, CDs, DVDs, and Blu-ray discs are listed in detail in a separate chapter. As far as possible, the releases that officially brought one or more titles to market first were considered. However, some important unofficial releases of special or alternative recordings of historical importance have also been added.

This compilation represents the first attempt to document Johnny Cash's entire recording career in a comprehensive way. As its author, I am fully aware that no such work can ever be entirely complete or entirely free of error. I therefore warmly welcome any additions, corrections, or clarifications that attentive readers may wish to share; these can be sent to the following email address: rwrodel@gmail.com. Above all, I hope this book will provide both insight and enjoyment.

Thorembais St.-Trond, April 20, 2026
Rolf Rödel

STRUCTURE AND FORMAT

The Johnny Cash recordings are presented chronologically by date, including the recordings of Anita Carter, June Carter Cash, Maybelle Carter, the Carter Family, Carl Perkins, and the Statler Brothers, if linked with Johnny Cash and/or his band, the Tennessee Three. The multitude of Johnny Cash's guest appearances with other artists is, as far as it was possible, also included.

The manuscript is divided into three main sections and four appendixes:

The studio recording sessions

The live recordings, and the radio and television shows

The releases

Appendix #1: Recording sessions with unknown recording dates

Appendix #2: Book readings

Appendix #3: Radio and television commercials

Appendix #4: Overview of some special overdub sessions from 1958

1. THE STUDIO RECORDING SESSIONS

The goal was to collect all Johnny Cash recording sessions, including the overdub sessions and demos. The overdub sessions of a title, whose number considerably increased from the end of the Seventies on, are gathered with the regular sessions to avoid losing track of the recorded title. When the same title was rerecorded later, it is shown in a separate recording session.

From 1970 on, the main documentation used in this book are the AFM documents and, if available, the timecards showing the presence of the musicians at each session and the songs they performed. The discographical material included in the booklets accompanying the LPs and CDs and in the various written publications (books and magazines) was also used as a helpful guideline.

Sun Records period

Sun Records didn't use take numbers until the late 1950s. But to help the reader, take numbers have been assigned to the different versions of the same title recorded within one recording session. Generally, the take designations assigned originally by Martin Hawkins and Colin Escott on their Sunbox-103 release and discographical work are kept, with some exceptions. Having had the opportunity to listen and to analyze a big part of the original

Sun tapes over a two-year period, it was here and there possible to add some details and to proceed with small corrections.

However, when a title was overdubbed with additional instruments and/or vocals, then a letter is added to the take number (take 1 for the undubbed version, take 1-A for the overdubbed version). If the same basic version was overdubbed several times, the overdubbed versions are indicated as take 1-A, take 1-B, take 1-C... And sometimes, when overdubbed versions were overdubbed again, it was necessary to assign additional numbers like take 1-A1, take 1-A2, take 1-B1... (see particularly the Hank Williams songs sessions in May 1958.) For these overcomplicated situations, overview charts are placed as Appendix #4 in this book.

As Colin Escott, Martin Hawkins and John L. Smith proceeded in their discographies, the original “U” master numbers that Sun assigned to a title at the time of release are shown here combined with the “7-” master numbers that Shelby Singleton later assigned to each master, when he purchased the Sun masters from Sam Phillips in June 1969.

Columbia Records period

Columbia Records did use take numbers until the end of the 1960s. The take numbers were assigned during the recording session at each attempt to perform a song right, even when the recording was interrupted after only a few seconds after the start. There are three categories indicated in this sessionography, as far as the information was available:

- False start

- Incomplete take (also often called long false start)

- Complete take

Until August 1963, each title was also assigned an “OB” (or “CB” from 1962 on) job order number and a master number was assigned to the take that was considered good enough to be released. From September 1963 on, the master number was assigned to each recorded title. This master number began with “CO” (or “NCO” from September 1963 on) for the recordings done in Nashville, TN, and “RHCO” (or “HCO” from September 1963 on) for the recordings done in Hollywood, CA.

Mercury Records period

Some session documents from the regular recording sessions pertaining to the *Classic Cash* album between October and December 1987 could not be found. Even the AFM office in New York could not find them in their archives. The session details from this period are based on the information provided by John L. Smith.

American Records period

It was unfortunately not possible to find the documents of each recording session, especially the 1993 demonstration sessions held at Rick Rubin's home. This part included in the book is based on the data provided by John L. Smith. Also, the regular sessions pertaining to the *Unchained* album are missing. Most of the other recording sessions are documented through the AFM files.

2. LIVE RECORDINGS, RADIO & TV SHOWS

In the era of the Internet, a gigantic number of audios and videos of Johnny Cash and June Carter Cash concerts and TV shows is available on a multitude of websites and it was not the intention to list them all in this book. The choice was made to show and to detail only live performances and shows when they were officially released in part or completely.

The Johnny Cash ABC TV Shows

The fifty-eight episodes of the Johnny Cash ABC TV shows from 1969 to 1971 are unfortunately incomplete because the official documentation of 1969 (15 episodes) is missing. Only three taping dates of 1969 are known to date, but we know that all 15 shows were taped between mid-April and early June 1969 before the first show was aired on television on June 7, 1969. The shows of 1970 and 1971 were generally taped a few days or weeks before the air dates. The recordings were done in segments that were later gathered to build each episode. So, in many cases, each episode aired on television contains segments that were taped at different times. To avoid any confusion to the reader, the content of each aired episode is maintained, and the taped sections are indicated in parentheses, if known.

3. THE RELEASES

The singles (S), extended-play records (EP), cassette tapes (CT), long-play records (LP), compact discs (CD), digital versatile discs (DVD) or Blu-ray discs (BD) listed and detailed in this section are not considered as complete and are only the ones indicated in the sections *The Studio Recording Sessions* and *Live Recordings, Radio and TV Shows*. For the reader who wants the most complete overview of Johnny Cash releases, I refer to *The Johnny Cash Record Catalog* compiled by John L. Smith (Greenwood Press, Westport, CT, 1994), the privately released publications of the International Johnny Cash Fan Club in The Netherlands and the website www.discogs.com.

Box set releases that are of historical importance like the Sunbox-103/CDSUNBOX-5 from Charly Records and the Bear Family CD box sets carry additional information after the reference number: the disc number, followed by the track number (BCD-16325-3/21 means disc 3, track 21).

Cassette tapes (CT) are only listed when an album was not released on LP. It was clear from the beginning that the material released officially by the record companies would be included in this sessionography. Nevertheless, some studio recordings are only available to date through unofficial CDs and a specific remark is indicated next to the concerned titles.

4. APPENDIXES

Special themes that could not be included directly in the main sections of this book are indicated in appendixes.

Appendix #1 includes recordings performed by Johnny Cash, but with unknown recording dates.

Appendix #2 includes book readings. They are placed here, because they are not musical recordings.

Appendix #3 includes some released radio and television commercials that Johnny Cash recorded in the Seventies. In most cases, session details are unknown.

Appendix #4 includes charts for better understanding of the overdub sessions of some Sun recordings from 1958. The titles are: "YOU WIN AGAIN," "I COULD NEVER BE ASHAMED OF YOU," "COLD, COLD HEART," "HEY, GOOD LOOKIN'," "I CAN'T HELP IT," "THE WAYS OF A WOMAN IN LOVE" and "THANKS A LOT".

USER'S GUIDE

The presentation of each session follows the standard conventions of discographies.

The releases with their label and catalog numbers are placed on the right side of the page. Further details of the releases can be found in the section *The Releases*.

The details of the overdub sessions are placed below the basic recording session of a title. When several titles were recorded during one session and later overdubbed one or several times, the details of each overdub session are gathered by each title for better reading convenience.

Each recording session indicates the following:

Date (and hours, if known) of the recording session. Additional information may be indicated (overdub session, live...).

The recording location with complete address, if known.

The names of the artists and the musicians with their instruments.

The name(s) of the producer(s).

A number appearing in parentheses next to the artist/musician refers to the specific title he is playing on.

The original job order or master number.

The title of the song that is recorded.

The composer(s)/writer(s) credit.

The released singles, EPs, CTs, LPs, CDs, DVDs/BDs with label and catalog number.

The choice of the release is based on its chronological release date. The releases in the U.S. are indicated by preference. The European, Asian, or Australian releases are indicated if no U.S. release exists or if they are of specific interest. Additionally, the Charly and Bear Family Records box sets are also included, due to their historical importance. For those box sets, the catalog number is completed by the disc and track number (BCD-15562-4/27 means disc 4, track 27).

THE STUDIO RECORDING SESSIONS

February 6, 1954

Munich, Germany

JOHNNY CASH, vocal, guitar.

DARLIN', AM I THE ONE

(Floyd F. Wilson)

Released on unofficial CD

Note: This recording was discovered on the Internet in November 2007 and made available for a short time. It is a song that Cash recorded in a studio in Munich, Germany, while he was serving in the U.S. Air Force. He has made this recording for his future wife, Vivian Liberto, and the reverse side of the disc is a narrated love letter to her. The exact recording date is indicated in a letter Cash sent to Vivian which is published in the book titled *I Walked The Line* by Vivian Cash with Anne Sharpsteen (Scribner, 2007). Both recordings were cut on an acetate disc and are available on unofficial releases.

Possibly second half of 1954

Possibly Memphis

JOHNNY CASH, vocal, guitar.

MY TREASURE

(John R. Cash)

Music On Vinyl MOVLP-285 (LP)

Columbia/Legacy 88697-60051-2 (CD)

BELSHAZZAR

(John R. Cash)

Music On Vinyl MOVLP-285 (LP)

Columbia/Legacy 88697-60051-2 (CD)

YOU'RE MY BABY

(John R. Cash)

Music On Vinyl MOVLP-285 (LP)

Columbia/Legacy 88697-60051-2 (CD)

Note: These are undated demo tapes (possibly home recordings) from Cash's own archive in Hendersonville, Tennessee. Although the booklet of the LP/CD indicates an unknown recording date and location, we can imagine that these titles were possibly recorded late 1954 before or just after his first audience with Sam Phillips at Sun Records. On the first verse of MY TREASURE Cash sings '*My treasures were untold*' which was later modified to '*My fortune was untold*' (see Cash's comment after the false start on take 1 during the session late 1954). While the lyrics of YOU'RE MY BABY have later received some small corrections, the version of BELSHAZZAR is very close to the final version. It is not clear if these titles have been recorded during the same day. It is interesting to note that BELSHAZZAR was the first title written by Johnny Cash which was protected by copyright. The registration date is July 28, 1954.

Late 1954

Sun Recording Studio, 706 Union Avenue, Memphis, Tennessee

JOHNNY CASH, vocal, guitar; unknown electric bass ⁽¹⁾ (overdub session date unknown); unknown electric guitar ⁽²⁾; unknown vocal harmony ⁽³⁾. Producer: SAM PHILLIPS.

WIDE OPEN ROAD

(John R. Cash)

Charly Sunbox-103-1/1 (LP)

Bear Family BCD-15517-1/1 (CD)

Bear Family BCD-16325-1/1 (CD)

7-40

YOU'RE MY BABY - take 1

(John R. Cash)

Charly Sunbox-103-1/2 (LP)

(with 2 false starts)

Bear Family BCD-15517-1/2 (CD)

(with 2 false starts)

Bear Family BCD-16325-1/2 (CD)

(with 2 false starts)

PICTURE CREDITS

Front cover:

Johnny Cash on September 26, 1994, at The Fillmore in San Francisco, California (Photo by Dan Dion © 1994, courtesy Leslie Barr)

Inside cover:

Detail of a photograph of Johnny Cash with David Roe Rorick on September 26, 1994, at The Fillmore in San Francisco, California (Photo by Dan Dion © 1994, courtesy Leslie Barr)

Inside cover:

Detail of a photograph of W.S. Holland, David Roe Rorick, Johnny Cash and Bob Wootton on September 26, 1994, at The Fillmore in San Francisco, California (Photo by Dan Dion © 1994, courtesy Leslie Barr)