

## Mp3 Urban Djin - Enabling Angel



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Traditional Country/ Western Swing/ Honky Tonk/ Cowboy Jazz 14 MP3 Songs COUNTRY: Western Swing, COUNTRY: Traditional Country Details: BIO I was born in Chicago, a child of the mid-fifties. It wasn't a particularly musical household, but there were a few records around and a crude hi fi. I remember a Marion Anderson disc which fueled a lifelong love of joyous singing and a devotion to the Cantatas of J.S. Bach which I share with my brother John to this day. And my father had a Fats Waller disc which opened my young ears to musical humor. Piano lessons were a disaster. Didn't take her long to proclaim me talentless and unworkable! Country and Western music I had to discover on my own and by a very circuitous path. I had a little AM transistor radio with which I found the little stations at the far end of the dial. Mostly Southern Soul, Gospel on Sunday. I started buying 45s at the little shop down the street, The House of Music. Soon I was hooked. One day when I was eleven or so, the proprietor, George, asked me if I ever bought LPs. I replied that I hadn't. He pointed out that you got a lot more songs for the money. "I've got a real good one here for \$1.99," he said and handed me the record that would change my life forever. Wow, I thought, sixteen songs for two dollars! I ran home with my prize, a Duke Ellington small group record, the group on one side led by Johnny Hodges, on the other side led by Rex Stewart. At the first golden note from Johnny Hodges' alto saxophone something happened. Chills ran down my spine, my skin trembled with goosebumps, and tears welled up in my eyes. I'd never experienced anything like it and I played that first tune, "Daydream," over and over and over again for hours before I listened to any other tracks. I play and sing the song to this day. (see tattoo photo section at [urbandjin.com](http://urbandjin.com)) I listened to both sides of that record obsessively for weeks, to the exclusion of all non essential activities. Then I went to the library. At first I checked out more Ellington and soon "Jump for Joy" just lit up my hungry young ears. That's when I discovered Herb Jeffries. I didn't know then that he

had been "The Bronze Buckaroo," one of the greatest of the singing cowboys, in the thirties. But I sure knew that his voice and phrasing thrilled me. For a while I thought I liked Jazz. But as I heard more and more I slowly began to realize that, although I really liked Louis, Miles, Duke, Jelly, Ella, and a bunch of others, most Jazz left me cold. I wasn't getting the fix I needed. My trips to the library became more frequent and I started listening to anything and everything. I was desperate to get more of that direct, emotional high. Then I spotted Lefty in the front of a cutout bin. Lefty Frizzell's Greatest Hits. The bloated face on the cover caught my eye from ten feet away. There was a delicate ambiguity in his expression, a deep sadness in his eyes that a promo-photo-smile just couldn't hide. I now owned two LPs. It wasn't until Bear Family put out it's encyclopedic box set in the eighties that I learned that few, if any, of Lefty's greatest hits even made his top one hundred recordings. But the sound of his voice hypnotized me. I felt like he was singing directly to me, that there was something very important that he was trying to tell me. And there were the chills, the goosebumps. On that day, at twelve or thirteen years of age, I became a country singer. Needless to say, there was very little support for an aspiring country singer on the South side of Chicago in the late sixties. My friends were getting into blues, Velvet Underground, Jimi Hendrix, west coast psychedelia. Even if they would grudgingly respect the Byrds or the Flying Burrito Brothers, after all they'd read about them in Rolling Stone, they weren't willing to go the whole hog with me. And I was definitely going the whole hog. Bob Wills, Hank Williams, Loretta Lynn, George Jones, Johnny Cash, Webb Pierce, anything I could find on Starday, etc. Being an insecure, oddball teenager who did want to be accepted, who did want friends, I socialized eventually, and assimilated the general tastes of my peer group. But Lefty's voice haunted me still. I knew something my friends didn't, something Lefty had taught me. But I still didn't know what to do about it. It wasn't until I went away to college and started meeting a lot of people from well beyond the neighborhood that I found out that many other people loved C&W. And that Lefty was a very well respected giant. And that no, contrary to the attitudes I had run into in Chicago, C&W people weren't illiterate rubes. One day the professor of my English class used an example from a country song to make a point. I went up after class and asked if he liked Country and Western music. He enthused for about five minutes about how, "The best songwriters in pop music are almost all in Nashville. Bob Dylan was shrewd to choose New York over Nashville. He wouldn't have had a chance. They would have eaten him alive!" etc., etc. I felt such vindication. Maybe my friends were the ones who didn't get it. Maybe I'm not crazy after all! Besides learning to trust my instincts and taste, the other major

event from those years was falling under the influence of Ron Dewar. Ron who? Yeah, I know, it's hardly a household name. Although his resume is most impressive (He played with Elvis!), Ron is just too damn humble and self-effacing to toot his own horn, so to speak. But put a tenor sax, or a soprano, or a C melody, or a clarinet, or even a bass clarinet in his hands and stand back! The man is simply incapable of playing an inappropriate phrase. I followed Ron around for years catching him any time I could in a staggering array of contexts, from Hot Jazz to Brazilian music. Everything I know about phrasing I learned from listening to Ron. I'm quite sure he doesn't relish that responsibility, but it's true. He's pretty much retired now, but I'm honored to call him a friend. And I hope I can coax him into the studio once again before he stops playing altogether. Fast forward to 1978. By now I'm hanging out with a lot of musicians, some of whom share my passion for C&W. School's over and I want to play music. I played a lot of coffeehouses and open mics, learning first-hand that there was no audience whatsoever for the music I was aching to play. So I started a bar band, Big Daddy Sun and the Outer Planets, with my friend Ron Cannon. He was the Sun. I was Uranus. We got some buddies to play with and we were off. I had been in a few garage bands in high school, but was just too mercurial to do the ensemble thing well. I was still volatile as a young man and the chemistry between Ron and I was intense. He loved country too but was much more of a rock n' roller than I was. I loved singing pretty ballads and crying-in-your-beer sad country songs. It was a strange mix, but when it worked, it worked. We toured around a lot and I drank way too much. Pretty much made an ass of myself night after night, but people kept coming back and pretty soon there were more of them. By 1980 there was an emerging Rockabilly scene and we slid right into it. Gone were my beloved ballads and trucker songs, but the audience was sure a lot bigger. It was a lot of fun, but it was a poor fit with my own musical yearnings. And my drinking was out of control. Being on the road was a BAD idea! So I quit and shortly afterwards hooked up with a country bar band called Max Reverb and the Wild Caucasians which had a three nights a week six set residency at a biker/trucker joint called the "Tee Pee Lounge" in Oak Lawn. The gig was falling apart when I joined. I probably hastened the band's demise (Was I ever in over my head! The great John Brumbach played tenor sax in the band. Those guys could play!), but, musically, I knew that I was home again. And I was living on 12th Place and Halsted at the time, right by the Maxwell Street Market. The best time of my life. Maxwell Street was Paradise on Earth, but that's another story. (See "Maxwell Street" in the "Rants Raves" section at [urbandjin.com](http://urbandjin.com).) Street music in that rich milieu became my outlet. Though it was known as a blues scene,

I quickly found out that many southern bred black folks loved Country and Western music. They made interesting requests and I tried to learn the songs they asked for. Ironical though it may seem to some, they got it in ways that white Chicago really doesn't. Everything I know about putting across a song I learned in the fourteen years I lived by and played at the old market. When I'm dying and the newsreel of my life rolls before my eyes, I'd like to slow down and linger a while on old Maxwell Street. That world is now long gone. Apparently it was an eyesore. Nothing a bunch of politically connected contractors couldn't fix! I thought it was the most beautiful place in the Universe. In the mid 90's "The Bronze Buckaroo Rides Again" came out and I renewed acquaintance with an old idol, Herb Jeffries, in a brand new context. That really got me back into playing cowboy songs and western swing tunes and eventually into writing western themed songs inspired by Herb. There are five modern cowboy songs, each developing themes of loneliness and alienation, but from very different perspectives, on my second CD. These were written in honor of The Bronze Buckaroo. Fast forward again. Midlife Crisis. Marriage, corporate job, future plans... everything I thought I had going for me either evaporated or blew up in my face in the short space of a couple years. And the bulldozers came to Maxwell Street. I had to move like a thief in the night, abandoning most of my stuff. In that long, dark night I reached for my guitar again and, as I caressed her neck, I found all the answers I needed. I knew what I had to do. And that's what I do. Post crisis management I have rededicated myself to serving my muses, to playing the music I love with the best players I can find. And I have been blessed with wonderful people to play with. Annalee, Brian, Casey, Colin, Gerald, Gordon, Jeff, Jim, Josh, Matt, Rick, Ron, Steve. I pinch myself everyday just to make sure I'm not dreaming. You can't really call it a career, but it sure beats workin'! Hey, there's a reason they call it playing music. And Lefty Frizzell's voice haunts me to this day. He's been dead for almost thirty years now, but when I listen to him now, he's still singing directly to me. And the chills still come. Now that's immortality! I like to think that he's smiling somewhere. Pleased to have touched another soul, changed another life, launched another country singer.

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