

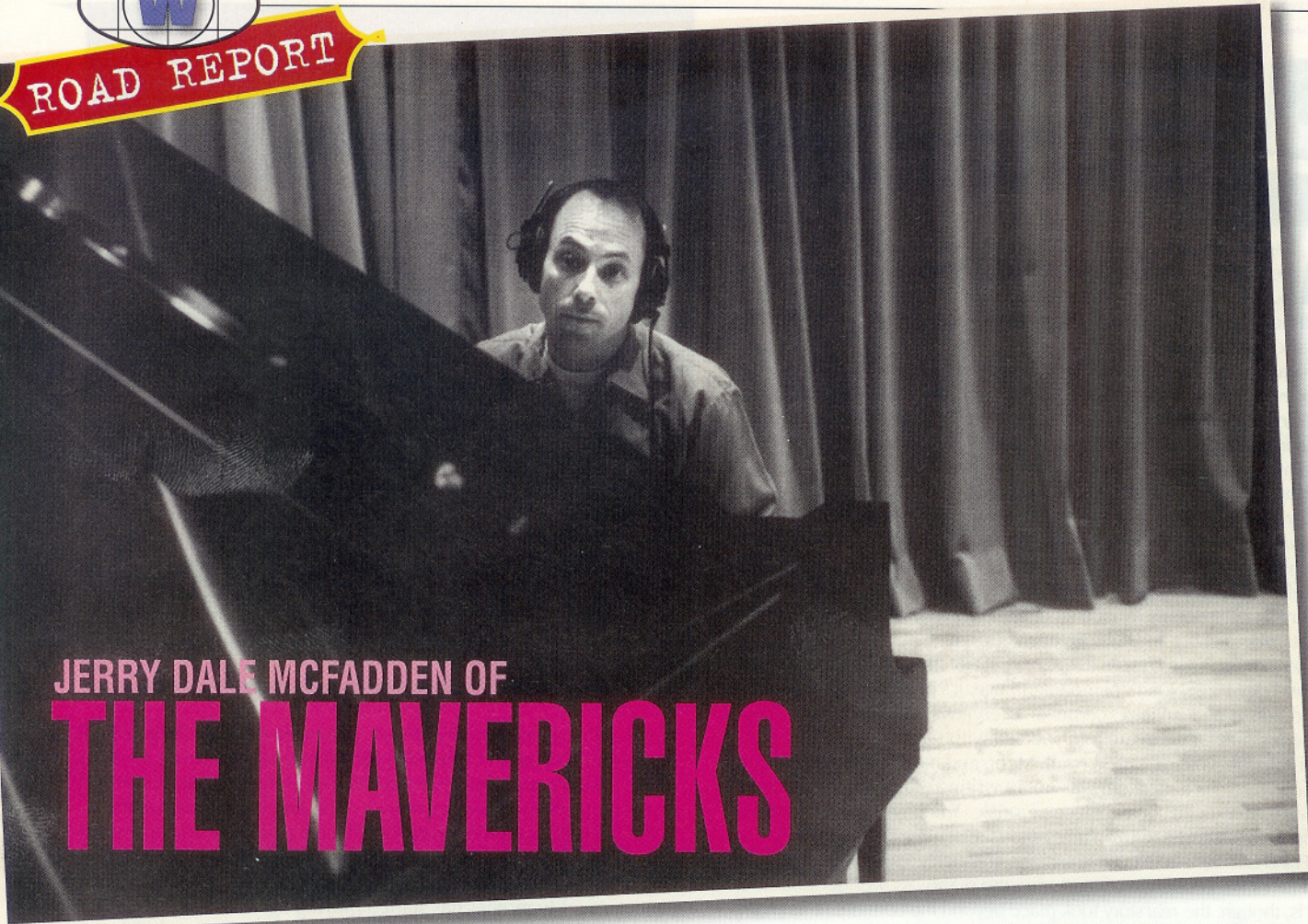
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Wheat Williams

“Jerry Dale McFadden of the Mavericks”.
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Interview during the tour for *Music for All
Occasions*.



ROAD REPORT



JERRY DALE MCFADDEN OF **THE MAVERICKS**

To call the four men in the Mavericks a country band is to shortchange their talents. Sure, they've got a Grammy and a slew of other country music awards, and their album *Music for All Occasions*, filled with radio-palatable country arrangements, has gone gold, but their concerts show them in a much broader light. Lead singer Raul Malo, of Cuban extraction, writes country but sings like a tenor Frank Sinatra. The Mavs will lead the audience in an authentic sing-along of "Okie from Muscogee" one minute, and blast through credible reggae or Brazilian mambo music the next, with a nod to Belafonte along the way.

An indispensable ingredient in this musical melting pot has been the unofficial Fifth Maverick, keyboardist Jerry Dale McFadden. "Country music has been a part of my life at all times," he tells us, "but there have been plenty of times when I didn't want to have anything to do with it. A few years ago I would have laughed if you told me I was going to play in a country band, but I see the Mavericks as very different than that." McFadden spent more than a decade playing piano in Nashville clubs, and went on to tour with Jason (of the Scorchers) for his solo outing in 1990. A year later, after a short "unplugged" tour with Amy Grant, Jerry Dale found himself playing a songwriters' show-

case on the same bill with Raul Malo. "I was blown away by his solo performance. He's such an incredible singer. And he reminded me that I had played a gig with Jason in New York where the Mavericks opened. Raul said that show was one of his favorites they ever did. But I didn't tell him that I never go see the other band on the bill . . . that I hadn't really ever seen them play." The originally Miami-based Mavericks, a quartet of two guitars, bass, and drums, had usually traveled with a multi-instrumental sideman playing fiddle, pedal steel, and accordion, but it hadn't worked out to their satisfaction. Before Malo invited McFadden to accompany them on a tour of Brazil, the Mavericks had never worked with a keyboard player. "It was so much fun, and

it really gelled so quickly," says McFadden, who also shoulders the harmony vocal duties.

Since the Mavericks had established their image as a quartet, McFadden is considered a sideman, not a band member. But there's no question in the minds of the fans that he helps define the Maverick's maverick musical vision. For instance: "I turned them on to a bunch of bizarre, orchestrated, cheesy easy listening music: Esquivel, Martin Denney, Arthur Lyman, and orchestral pop stuff," he explains. "We listened to that stuff all the time on the bus, and then Raul started writing like that. That's why the new album has a '60s easy-listening feel to it."

Originally consisting of just a Korg piano and an E-mu Vintage Keys (for organ sounds), McFadden's rig now houses a Yamaha P300 digital piano built into the shell of a spinet upright, and a real Hammond B-3 with an over-driven Leslie. Crowning the setup are four lava lamps on top of the instruments. Occasionally, he doubles on accordion and vibraphone.

The key to playing with the Mavericks is spontaneity. "When we headline, we play for two and a half hours, and every night is always different. There's a set list lying there, but we don't really use it." In addition to their considerable body of original country hits, "we do innumerable covers, the most wacked-out things we can think of — from Zeppelin and Pearl Jam to Dean Martin and Nat King Cole songs. We don't even rehearse them; we just jump right in."

Fans may be startled to know that the band's musical horizons are about to expand again. Last summer the Mavs played on an album project for guitarist Scotty Moore and drummer D. J. Fontana, from Elvis' original band. Furthermore, McFadden and Mavericks bassist Rob Reynolds have started their own album project, but it will be in the alternative rock vein. "Robert and I have been doing a lot of writing lately. We've recorded with Ken Coomer from Wilco, and Tom Lewis from Junior Brown's band on drums, and with Tom Peterssen of Cheap Trick on bass. We'll be bringing in a whole host of other well-known players. There's kind of a buzz going around, but we haven't shopped it to any labels yet."

McFadden feels a great deal of support both from within the band and from their many loyal fans. Whichever direction the music goes, success is likely to follow the Mavericks. —*Wheat Williams*