

## THE TIME HAS COME FOR



# IIIrd Tyme Out

I have three treasures...  
And the third one is not to dare to be ahead of the world...  
Because of not daring to be ahead of the world, one becomes the leader of the world.  
—Lao Tzu, 6th Century BC

If you genuinely love roller coaster rides, then you're cut out for the life of a professional bluegrass musician. Consider the case of IIIrd Tyme Out, the southeast's red hot quintet.

With plenty of material in the charts, the group appears on a career roll that few groups could ever match as 1993, its third festival season, approaches. The addition of former Livewire mandolinist Wayne Benson and utterly amazing banjoman Barry Abernathy to stalwart founders Ray Deaton, Russell Moore and Mike Hartgrove have given IIIrd Tyme Out yet another impressive outfit. After closing 1992 and beginning the new year with their first road trip as the band, Deaton simply could not contain his enthusiasm.

*By Art Menius*

"This first time we went out on the road Wayne and Barry fell right in on the spot! They're amazing. Our vocals are the strongest they've ever been. The tone of our voices just fit really well. We had rehearsed for about a week, then Wayne and Barry went home for three or four days. When they came back they knew every song we do." So easily and rapidly did the current line-up coalesce that plans not only for their third compact disc, but an all-gospel fourth and a video for Rebel Records are moving rapidly along, according to Ray. The band, meanwhile, looked forward to heading for Nashville at the end of January to find out how many of their nine, count 'em, nine, nominations at the SPBGMA awards would turn into trophies.

Like the other recent megastars, the Lonesome River Band, IIIrd Tyme Out knows that you have to hang tough through the hard times and keep moving forward no matter what, in order to reap the rewards. Lesser folks could never have withstood the series of

ups and downs that confronted Deaton, Moore and Hartgrove from June through November, 1992. They don't dwell on the subject, but it could not have been an easy year psychologically for the trio who gave up safe, high profile jobs with Doyle Lawson & Quicksilver to form IIIrd Tyme Out.

One thing remained consistent throughout, however. IIIrd Tyme Out sounded great show after show. The enthusiastic reaction of their growing hoard of fans proved that audiences had no idea that the killer band was enduring a tumultuous, albeit triumphant, season on the brink.

Back in June the summer of 1992 loomed before them with a slew of choice festival dates and hardly a weekend off through their IBMA Bluegrass Fan Fest appearance at

the end of September. On the second weekend of June, IIIrd Tyme Out had dates at Lexington, Ky., and Wind Gap, Pa., followed by a bus trip all the way to the California Bluegrass Association's Father's Day Festival in Grass Valley, Cal. Their eponymous debut compact disc for Rebel Records, released around Labor Day 1991, had exploded onto bluegrass radio in 1992.

"IIIrd Tyme Out" had grabbed the number four position when *Bluegrass Unlimited* inaugurated its "Top 10 Bluegrass Albums" in January, and would spend most of the year alternating between there and third place while other releases moved past then fell as quickly behind. It finally exited the Top 10 in October. IIIrd

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Tyme Out's true action happened on the song charts. In January, Carl Jackson's "Erase The Miles" had debuted at Number 29. By the June issue its climb to the top had achieved the fourth spot. That month two other tracks from "IIIrd Tyme Out" had placed in the top 30: "Phone Call Away," written by Pete Goble at 13, and the Ernest Tubb cover "Thanks A Lot" at 20. The band, meanwhile had taken possession of the first batch of cassettes for their second Rebel CD, the aptly titled "Puttin' New Roots Down" just before Lexington.

Just as rapidly, however, the other shoe can fall. On the Tuesday before Lexington and Wind Gap, mandolinist, baritone, and second line lead singer Alan Bibey abruptly resigned from the band to take a job at the Carolina Opry in Myrtle Beach. Fortunately veteran pro Lou Reid,

who had recently formed his own group after leaving the Seldom Scene, would climb on the bus for those festivals and the long junket to the west coast.

"I called Lou at 1:30 Wednesday night and he was playing a gig," then banjo player Terry Baucom said a couple of days after the fact. "He called me at 2:30. I said 'Get your stuff. We've got to go.'"

Back on the road again, IIIrd Tyme Out played the Festival Of The Bluegrass Friday night and departed for northeastern Pennsylvania. Saturday found them in, of all places, Allentown—the bus broken down by the side of US 22. Bluegrass music devotees, of course, came to the rescue. One man drove his van to pick them up and then take them back to the festival site, where a music-loving bus mechanic repaired the transmission. He refused both real and symbolic compensation.

After all that and two sets at Wind Gap, Saturday night found IIIrd Tyme Out relaxed and in great spirits. Despite all the week's hassles, the four members and Reid had no complaints as they sat around the bus with a journalist and a complete stranger who had followed them aboard. Following four sets with the group, Reid expressed his amazement with how well structured and organized the band proved. Despite not knowing much of the material, he thoroughly enjoyed playing as part of IIIrd Tyme Out.

Little surprise, then, that Reid chose to disband the Lou Reid Band and join IIIrd Tyme Out. The late July announcement barely preceded "Erase The Miles" achieving the number one spot in the song section of the *Bluegrass Unlimited* "National Bluegrass Survey." The already busy group inherited as many of the Lou Reid Band dates as their schedule permitted. That roller coaster ride surged upward again.

more than a talented super-group with touchstones in both traditional and contemporary bluegrass and country music. IIIrd Tyme Out stands for a way of life for bluegrass bands, an articulated philosophy of how to handle everything from their devastatingly good vocal arrangements to arguments over stage attire.

"I can say personally from having been out with many bands, these guys really do have it together as far as organization. All working together as one," Reid observed after 48 hours with IIIrd Tyme Out. "This is the best little organization that can make decisions and work together and do 'em. They're not afraid. They know what they want and they want to get along.

"These guys know their jobs. Ray knows the timing and the right things and the places to put the bass. Russell [Moore on guitar and lead vocals] knows when to pump the g runs and accentuate the rhythms and he definitely knows how to sing. And Terry Baucom being one of the best on the five-string banjo with his sense of timing. I'm talking about Mr. Metronome. And [Mike] Hartgrove has spent his lifetime learning how to back up lead singers and vocalists. He does that very well. When you put all that together, how can you go wrong?"

Reid briefly made IIIrd Tyme Out a collection of five alumni of Doyle Lawson & Quicksilver. Baucom and Reid formed half of the first edition of the group in 1979, belonging for six and three years respectively. Moore joined in 1985, Deaton in 1986 and Hartgrove in 1988. It's small wonder then that the group worked so well musically. For that matter, original mandolinist Bibey had worked with Baucom, Jimmy Haley and Randy Graham in the mid-1980s band New Quicksilver.

"Everybody's got the same timing almost," noted Deaton.

IIIrd Tyme Out, however, had already put down plenty of new roots during its year and a half and two compact discs with Alan Bibey's mandolin and vocals. Credits for the group's rapid success has to go to hard work, careful planning and good timing, but all those factors only produce results when a band has that special

Tyme Out the beginning came during February, 1991, when Doyle Lawson & Quicksilver members Moore, Hartgrove and Deaton decided to form a band and contacted Bibey and Baucom.

"I still felt that little bit of reservation in everybody until we did get together, until that first song to see where we were at musically in relation to each other." Moore noted.

did."

Then the work began, but so did the planning. IIIrd Tyme Out not only worked on harmonies and material, the five tried to create a utopian working band. Each member had paid his dues and experienced the business vertically and horizontally. Thus they planned to avoid problems.

"Before we ever put the band together, we went to Terry's house,"



**IIIrd Tyme Out, L-R: Mike Hartgrove, Wayne Benson, Russell Moore, Ray Deaton and Barry Abernathy**

"We had those reservations, but after the first song..."

"It cleared that up," said Baucom, completing the thought.

"You've got to have a certain amount of chemistry going among the people that form the group. We had that the first time we got together and rehearsed," recalled Deaton, whose first professional gig, after years of playing with his uncles and a short career as a professional go-cart racer, came as mandolinist and tenor singer with Georgia band Clearwater. "The first song we tried,

Deaton explained. "We sat down and had about a four or five hour meeting to discuss business. About once every month or six weeks we have a meeting. We just sit down and, if anybody has a problem, we clear the air. If anybody has a problem with anything, we talk about it."

"We've realized that the sooner we bring it up and get it clear, the easier it is to ride together and to play music," added Moore, who came east from Texas in 1984 as part of Southern Connection with future Doyle Lawson & Quicksilver mem-

bers Scott and Curtis Vestal and Mark Keller, who would later play in the Larry Stephenson Band.

"Everyone here is pretty much seasoned musicians," said Deaton. "Everybody knows what you've got to do and what you don't do. It works well like that. We all get along great on account of it...We vote on everything...That's majority. And if you lose, that's too bad but no problem because you might win the next one. And nobody gets upset about that."

Yet the IIIrd Tyme Out majority refuses to rule tyrannically. That proves a key to their successful working model of the perfect bluegrass band structure. The group deals sensitively with strongly held feelings. If one member truly dislikes a song they are doing, they throw out the selection.

The band anticipated, and thus avoided, problems from the start, as Ray tells it. "We weighed all that stuff out. If you want to do something and I really don't. I think, 'Well, does it make that much difference if he really wants to do it that bad.' Because somebody is going to bend for me sometime. For example, I was sick. It was the first show I ever missed since I've been playing professional music. Those guys did a show as a four part...And when they came back they paid me my part just like I had been on stage. They didn't have to do that and I told them not to, but they did it."

"There's a time and a place for everything," Moore interjected. "There's always going to be individuals who have their own band and hire musicians and they call the shots. There's nothing wrong with that, but it's not going to work for this band."

"We've all been there before. We've already done that," said Deaton. "In this band nobody's any better than anyone else. It takes every person to do the job. Everybody's equal. I think in the times to come that there will be a lot more bands that are doing the same partnership idea as what we are. If you are a part of something, you are a lot more interested in it."

That kind of solid unity on the structural and business end of

being a band frees the members of IIIrd Tyme Out from petty distractions. Sitting on that bus after a very long day at Wind Gap you could feel the mutual respect and trust supported by IIIrd Tyme Out's stable foundation. That firm footing permitted the band to withstand both the successes and the several curve balls that 1992 threw at them.

The push to get even better comes from positive reinforcement and honest criticism. IIIrd Tyme Out has deliberately created an atmo-


sphere where members have no fear of trying new things, suggesting innovations, or trying new material on the others. Deaton explained that if he brought a song to the band, "everybody in the band is willing to try to work it up if it's a good song. And if he wants to bring something else to the band, everybody's willing to do that. We respect each other for that. Russell's the one who came up with a lot of the material."

"It more or less works down to a democratic vote," Moore affirmed.


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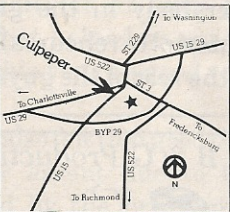


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"When we're working up a song everybody has their equal amount of input into it," said Deaton. "When we start we'll structure the thing several different ways. We'll swap the parts around and we'll play the tape back and which ever has the best blend, that's the way we'll do it. It doesn't make any difference who's singing the part."

According to Moore, IIIrd Tyme Out's new democracy encompasses song selection. He explained to Buddy Michaels, popular host of the Weekend Festival on WPCM-FM 101.1 in Burlington, N.C., during an August, 1992 interview that, "We have a five piece group and everyone's input is welcome and is taken into consideration. It's more democratic than one or two people having the say as to what's going to be done and what's not going to be done. I've always felt that two heads are better than one. When we work up material everybody in the group will bring material to rehearsals and bring it up to the rest of the guys. We all put our

input into each song. When we've got everything that we feel we need to do to that song, then we sit back and listen to it and we'll take a vote. If it gets voted in, it stays and if it gets voted out, then it's not done. And I feel that hits more of a general audience than one person picking all the material.

"You've got thoughts coming from pretty hard-core traditionalists within the group, then myself, I lean towards nice ballads and more contemporary types of material. Ray grew up in the traditional bluegrass mode, playing mandolin and singing tenor and he's just got a wealth of knowledge as far as songs. Just all that put together, I feel like it gives us more of an edge in picking material."

"There's no one star in this band. All I want to do is be a part of it," Deaton attested. For example, "We value Mike's opinion a whole, whole lot because Mike doesn't sing. He can sing, but he doesn't. We'll work up a vocal and we'll sing it two or three different ways and we'll ask Mike

which way sounds the best. And he's real honest about it. He'll honestly tell you."

Moore explained why IIIrd Tyme Out opted for the fiddle. "You've got the opportunity with the five piece band to broaden our repertoire. For slow material it's mandatory to have a dobro or a fiddle, anything with sustain. Having played with a five piece and with a four piece, I'd much rather be with a five piece."

With a shared background, the IIIrd Tyme Out vocals blended quickly as the band prepared through the spring of 1991 for its debut at the Cody Creek Family Style Bluegrass Festival near Dobson, N.C., on May 18. WPAQ-AM in Mount Airy broadcast a tape of that first show a few days later.

At Wind Gap, Deaton recalled the work that went into that performance. "We rehearsed a whole bunch. Before we'd done the first show they came down to my grandmother's place. We went out to [Everett's] Music Barn and got on that sound system.

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Every day we went down and started about 12 noon and rehearsed on stage with the sound system and made a tape of every song we did. We tried to get the blend and all the instruments like we thought they should be. We started at noon and went into the wee hours every night. We did that for five or six days before we did our first show. Over and over and over."

Russell came up with the name, as he told WPCM's Michaels. "We were riding, going home one night, Ray and Mike and myself and I just brought the name up. It popped into my head. I thought to myself, this is going to be my third time in a professional bluegrass band. I knew it was going to be Ray's and also Mike's. Now Mike's been affiliated with other types of music. He was in country playing fiddle for a while with Moe Bandy and then George Jones. Then he went to work with the Bluegrass Cardinals. He was there for eight years and then he went with Doyle Lawson & Quicksilver and was there for about two and a half. And then we split to form IIIrd Tyme Out, so that was going to be his third group also... We just rolled it around along with a few other names and that's the one that surfaced to the top."

Just three weeks after the band's debut performance IIIrd Tyme Out recorded their first Rebel Records compact disc. With ace Nashville engineer and producer Bil VornDick at the controls "IIIrd Tyme Out" (Rebel CD 1691) displayed their glistening bluegrass sound. The release showed a band planted in both traditional and contemporary bluegrass.

Calling the band's first release "one of the more notable bluegrass happenings in recent months," veteran *Bluegrass Unlimited* reviewer Les McIntyre found much to praise. "There is a level of consistency," he wrote in the March, 1992 issue, "that prevails throughout rendering practically all the selections prime candidates for extensive airplay... IIIrd Tyme Out is destined to be one of the significant bluegrass bands of the 1990s." While many of the selections on the disc came from

today's writers such as Pete Goble, Wes Golding, Norman Wright and Carl Jackson, they also disclosed a love of classic country with covers of "Miles Of Texas," "Thanks A Lot" and "Love Gone Cold."

That trend became even more pronounced on "Puttin' New Roots Down" (Rebel CD-1703). Lonesome Standard Time's Larry Cordle contributed the title track and "Lower On The Hog," a good election year song that emerged as an early airplay leader for the release. Much of the disc, however, consists of fresh, distinctive bluegrass versions of country landmarks from Hank Williams, Sr., Jimmie Rodgers, Ray Price and Kitty Wells. From traditional bluegrass the band resurrected Carl Story's "No End To Heaven" and Charlie Moore's "I'm Leaving Detriot."

Rather than cash in on their previous membership in Doyle Lawson & Quicksilver, IIIrd Tyme Out chose to avoid performing Quicksilver songs. The band has created their repertoire that reflects their own style connecting yesterday, today and tomorrow.

"We want this band to stand on its own merits. We don't want to lean on anybody else. That's not what we're after," said Moore. "If you want to look at the overall picture, it's not doing you any good. It's not doing the promoters any good—who are you going to book if you have two bands doing the same songs.

"We have traditionalists in the band and we have people that are maybe more contemporary. There's always been a happy medium and nobody minds going a little bit this way or a little bit that way. Whatever makes the song work. We like all types of music. We want to encompass all of it, because we want to appeal to as many people as we can whether they are traditionalists or like the contemporary stuff. We like for all of them to come out to see our shows."

While recording "Puttin' New Roots Down" in March during a set of noon to midnight sessions at northern Virginia's Bias Studios, the band became major fans of engineer Bill

McElroy. "He's a great engineer. He's able to adapt. He listens to what you're telling him," Russell said. "He listens to what's on tape. How do you want this? How do you want that? So he knew what type of mix we wanted."

"Puttin' New Roots Down" appeared at the beginning of a packed festival season for IIIrd Tyme Out. Their second year bookings exceeded those of many long established groups. As the band's name suggest, however, few among brand new units had ever hit the bluegrass world as such proven quantities with every member already well-known.

"It's gone faster or exceeded what we thought it would at this point in time last year," Moore noted, perched on the edge of the sofa in their bus. Last year, "A lot of people had their festivals full. There were a few that made room for us and we appreciate that a whole lot. That helped us out that first year and gave us the opportunity to at least get exposure and that helped us out for this year. And this year's a good year for us."

Deaton also felt that good timing aided their ascent due to the opening created by the breakup of Hot Rize, New Grass Revival and the Virginia Squires, coupled with a reduced schedule for the Johnson Mountain Boys. "One thing, too, was the time that we did it. I think this is the time that everybody's ready for something different, new and fresh. I'm not cutting down anything that's already been done, but I think it was time for a new band to come about. A lot of bands were disbanding and there were a lot of changes in bands."

Given IIIrd Tyme Out's personnel, the Quicksilver influence proves noticeable, yet the band increasingly exhibits its own character not just through their material. The members' individual personalities and collective persona inform each song lending IIIrd Tyme Out, in Lou's words, "a different kind of edge, a freshness, because you can do what you want to do."

As Moore explained, "Wherever anyone in this band goes, because we listen to each other, you'll

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go with him every time to make it work. To be in a band you've got to be an individual, but doing that means listening to everybody else and complementing everybody else. Everybody's always had an open ear and listened to what's going on. If it starts going this way we want to be right there with you."

By the time IIIrd Tyme Out appeared in Owensboro on the IBMA International Bluegrass Music Awards show and performed at IBMA's Fan Fest, everybody sounded great and things looked mighty good for the band. "Erase The Miles" had just spent a second month at the top of *Bluegrass Unlimited's* National Bluegrass Survey before slipping to second in October. No sooner did "IIIrd Tyme Out" complete its nine month run among the Top 10 Bluegrass Albums than "Puttin' New Roots Down" debuted in the tenth spot in October, while "Lower On The Hog" and "I'm Leaving Detroit" entered the Top 30 songs. 1993 began with "Puttin' Down New Roots" number four among the albums, "Lower On The Hog" in fifth place and still climbing, "Erase The Miles" hanging in at 14 and "I'm Leaving Detroit" and "Crazy Arms" living a little lower on the charts.

But before that roller coaster year of 1992 had come to a close, the ground beneath IIIrd Tyme Out's new roots shifted again. Just before winter's onset Reid and Baucom gave their notice to form their own group!

Who would have blamed IIIrd Tyme Out for hanging it up then, but founders Moore, Deaton and Hartgrove are made of a lot sterner stuff than that. They're in this band, this business and this music for the whole long run. By Christmas their perseverance had been rewarded with a line-up, to many even stronger than the first two.

Wayne Benson became a mandolin star in North Carolina long before he joined his first full-time band, Livewire, with Scott Vestal, Ernie Sykes and Robert Hale. For several years you could locate Wayne at Doyle Lawson & Quicksilver's Family Style Bluegrass Festival in Denton simply by finding the very hottest jam session; he would always be in the center of it. Wayne proves a quiet

young man who lets his mandolin do the talking and it proves most eloquent. If you have any doubts just listen to his playing on Livewire's 1990 Rounder CD "Wired." Check out the title track where Wayne effortlessly trades licks with Vestal and son, exchanging breaks with Scott Vestal is like getting in a slam-dunk contest with Michael Jordan.

What surprised Deaton and his compatriots was how well Benson's harmony vocals fit into the IIIrd Tyme Out sound. When someone plays mandolin like Wayne does it's easy not even to bother to find out whether he could sing.

Everybody knew, on the other hand, about Barry Abernathy's vocals. "He's a killer singer," Deaton reported. "Barry has outstanding stage presence, and he's a really good lead singer. He can sing any part. We tried out several banjo players and Barry was the best man for the job. He blows me absolutely away when he picks."

That Barry has impeccable timing, rock solid tone and a rare melodic gift, in other words that he is a wonderful banjo player, just tells a part of the story. Barry possesses the kind of perseverance that makes him a perfect fit for a band that has survived a year of stressful emotional highs and lows. IIIrd Tyme Out has proven itself not another ephemeral super group but a band with a commitment to keep on playing and to continue getting better and better.

Finally, the members of IIIrd Tyme Out know who ultimately makes it possible for them to pursue the career they all love. Looking out the bus window at the crowd on an overcast, unseasonably, maybe even unreasonably, cool August afternoon at the Central Virginia Family Bluegrass Festival in Amelia, Deaton noted, "If it wasn't for the fans and the promoters, we couldn't do any of this. None of us could."

If the members of IIIrd Tyme Out sound a bit like the Five Musketeers, that's all right because their "all for one, one for all" philosophy proves genuine. They provide every reason to believe that their bluegrass utopia will stand the test of time.



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