

The COCONUT TELEGRAPH

MARGARITAVILLE CHRISTMAS 1988

VOLUME 4, NO. 10

Martin Lehmann

Jimmy Buffett's Margaritaville. A state of mind is now a state of being. But how did Margaritaville come into a "state of being?" Better yet, how did Margaritaville become a "state of mind?" How could some guy armed only with writers instruments; a pen and a legal pad, create all that is "Margaritaville?" Imagination.

Jimmy Buffett arrived in Nashville in 1969 prepared to embark on a recording career. Gerry Wood, an old JB associate and currently a writer for *Billboard Magazine* recalls that, "Barnaby Records signed the artist to a two-album contract — and Jimmy went into the studio to record *Down to Earth*."

"Unfortunately, the album didn't sell well. Undaunted, Jimmy went back into the studio to record his second album. Daunted, Barnaby Records "lost" the master tapes for this album titled *High Cumberland Jubilee*. A convenient excuse for a fledgling label that didn't want another no play / no pay LP."

"In a miracle that makes Lourdes look like a carnival shell game, these "lost" Buffett tapes were "found" years later, after Jimmy had become a star, and released on Janus Records. These first two albums show all the potential and promise that was soon to be realized."

In a story told many times, Jimmy headed for Miami for an alleged booking date. However, when he got there, no job. Settling in at old friend Jerry Jeff Walker's house allowed him time to regroup. A weekend drive down the overseas highway (aka A1A) landed Jimmy in the town that would prove to be the biggest influence in his musical career, the town that would provide the catalyst for "Margaritaville," the town that continues to play a large role in his life, Key West.

The Encyclopedia of Rock, compiled by Nick Logan and Bob Woffinden, states that, "Buffett's talent was hardly the sort that could be straight-jacketed by Nashville's orthodox music establishment. After signing with ABC-Dunhill, he recorded his second debut album, ironically again in Nashville, though this time with greater artistic freedom. Released in 1973, *A White Sport Coat and a Pink Crustacean* helped to establish him, and it was a reputation he was able to enhance with his next album, *Living and Dying in 3/4 Time*, which received good reviews, and contained the single "Come Monday".

Jimmy plunged from the flying pan of Nashville into the fire of Key West. Key West in the early 70's was much different than the Key West of today. Smugglers, servicemen, and shrimpers populated the island that had a reputation for harboring those seeking a lifestyle somewhat to the left of norm. Boarded store fronts dotted Duval St., and any delapidated building that housed a business invariably served alcohol; over or under the

counter. The proverbial end of the rainbow carried pot, but no gold. This was the cultural "melting pot" that was to inspire Jimmy to write "The Wino and I Know", "My Head Hurts, My Feet Stink, and I Don't Love Jesus", "Tin Cup Chalice", and "I Have Found Me A Home" among others. As Bob Anderson says about Jimmy in a 1986 interview in *High Times*, "Every outlaw has a good story, and Buffett has an eye and ear for them."

The "Oldest Living" Coral Reefer, Greg 'Fingers' Taylor recalls the early days in an interview with *Diddy Wah Diddy*, a Mississippi Blues newsletter. "In about 1972 I met Buffett. He was playing at the Hub, the Union Building at the University of Southern Mississippi. I was the local harp player, and would play with everybody. So I was just wandering through the Hub one night, and there was this guy with long blonde hair and a mustache playing 'Why Don't We Get Drunk and Screw' to about five little old ladies on break from their night class. I didn't know anything about him. I enjoyed some of the songs I was hearing, and of course I wanted to sit in. So we got up there and it was just sort of a chemistry, just one of those things. I think he had been looking for somebody else to go on the road with him. It's sort of lonely out there on the road. The next day I was driving him to his parents house in Mobile, the sun was coming up, and Jimmy was singing, there was a bonding that occurred there at that point; we knew that we were going to play music together somewhere down the line."



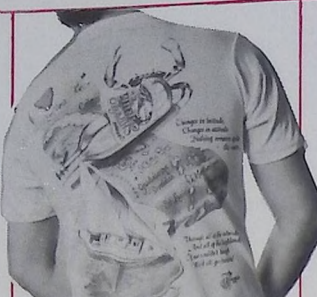
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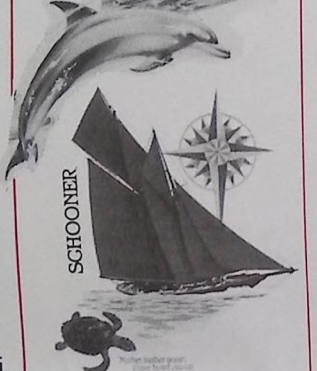
"People think we're all a bunch of guys who wear shorts and floppy hats and live in Key West, but the bands he's had are an amalgam of wild rock and rollers, blues players, R & B players, country players, and somehow that all comes together and works and is Jimmy Buffett music."



CHANGES IN LATITUDE



SON OF A SAILOR



SCHOONER

"In 1974 Buffett called and was ready to start the Coral Reefer Band. I went down to Key West. We put together the band and went on the road. Between 1974 and 1982 there was nothing but serious, serious roadwork. Especially in the seventies. On the first three albums there were essentially studio musicians in Nashville, but by the *Changes in Latitudes* album the band was good enough and we were enough of a unit that we went to Miami and did it as a band album. That was the one the hit came off of, 'Margaritaville'. Some of my favorite rocking crazy stuff came off that album. It was a change from that Nashville play-it-safe sound. I like the first albums, but they don't have the energy that 'Changes' had."

Michael Utley's association with Jimmy also began on the *White Sport Coat* album. Michael's musical introduction was the the Bill Black Combo, a well known instrumental group in Memphis. From there he was hired by Atlantic Records to be part of their studio band in Miami. Michael took this band and formed The Dixie Flyers; backup band for Rita Coolidge. Jimmy heard The Dixie Flyers on Jerry Jeff Walker's "Being Free" album, and asked Michael to play on his first ABC Dunhill album. Michael worked off and on with JB over the next several years, and became a full time Coral Reefer in 1982.

With the addition of Harry Daily, the original Coral Reefer Band was now complete. However, even without a



Photo by: Tom Corcoran

"You have to take the best from whatever the situation is and go on, and that's the whole point of the music to me. All through American history, populist singers and humorists have served as the nation's tickle spot, people like Will Rogers and Mark Twain. I see myself in that vein and fulfilling that sort of responsibility. I give people a few shots. It's as much a satirical pinprick as anything else. You just have to remind people of the day-to-day funny things. When I write songs, I look for interesting little innuendoes or pieces of situations everybody has experienced."

Jimmy Buffett

In a 1980 interview with *The Miami Herald's Tropic Magazine*.

Writing in a *Rolling Stone* article in 1977, Chet Flippo described Jimmy as, "the perfect composite of the rocking folkie: wittier than John Prine or Steve Goodman, sunnier than Jerry Jeff Walker and harder edged than the wimps (who know who they are)".



J-BOAT



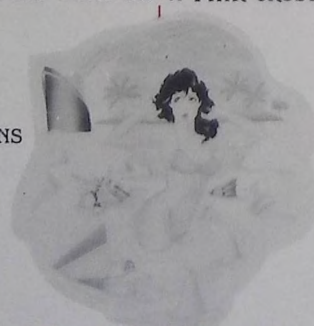
BALTIC TRADER

Caribbean Soul



WHITE SPORT COAT ON A PINK CRUSTACEAN.

FINS



physical band, in Jimmy's mind the Reefers were always there. Patricia Ward Biederman discussed the early days in a 1984 interview, "Although most of America had never heard of Buffett until 'Margaritaville', he has had a cult following in the South ever since he began strumming his six-string on the coffeehouse circuit 15 years ago. It is true that early Atlanta radio spots pronounced his name as if it were a serve-yourself meal and that not a single soul showed up for his New Year's Eve concert at the Bistro in 1971. But Buffett was soon packing them in throughout the south, including Florida and Texas. 'He worked this area as hard as anyone I've ever seen. He was selling 100,000 albums when nobody in the industry knew who Jimmy Buffett was,' recalls Jack Tarver, Jr., a former concert promoter. Says Tarver, who used to book Buffett into Atlanta's Great Southeast Music Hall in the early 1970s: 'He could sell out the Music Hall three or four days running well before he had a hit. It was not unusual to see people there all four nights'. On one memorable occasion, Buffett stole the show from another unknown, a Yankee named Billy Joel. Tarver speculates that it is Buffett's humor that has always endeared him to Dixie audiences. For instance, long before he had a single sideman, let alone his Coral Reefer Band, Buffett would pause in the midst of a number and say, 'Take it, Coral Reefers,' 'He'd stop and tap his foot and there'd be no damn band there,' Tarver remembers with a laugh."

In 1974, 'Come Monday', a single from *Living And Dying in 3/4 Time* became his first Top 30 hit. Typically, Jimmy was totally unaware of the success of the single. "I was in Europe working on a film production when I heard 'Come Monday' being played in the London Airport. I figured something was happening, and called home to find out we were on the charts."

All told the 70's were great years for Jimmy and The Coral Reefers. Jimmy aligned himself with a new management company, Frontline Management, and created a personal and professional relationship with the then head of Frontline, Irving Azoff. In a 1978 interview with Bill King of *The Atlanta Constitution* regarding his business affairs, Jimmy said, "I run 'em. I've always been in control of what I was doing and (Irving) came along and he's just the greatest at it and he's helping me tremendously. But he respects my knowledge and opinions because I've had to put up with a lot to get where I've got." It was Irving Azoff who arranged for Jimmy and the Reefers to open for the Eagles, the biggest group at the time (1977), thus giving him his first big exposure that allowed him to become a headliner.

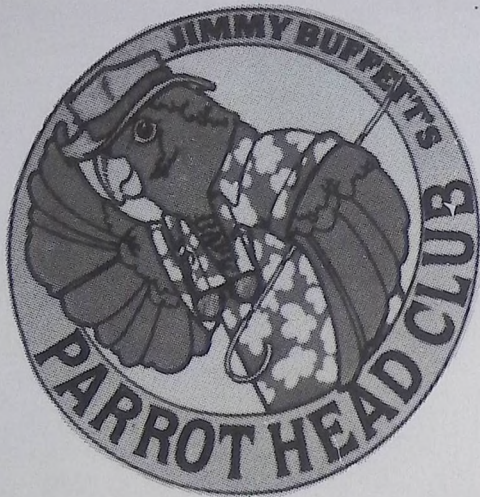
GET DRUNK



CHEESEBURGER IN PARADISE

MARGARITAVILLE





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- I'VE GOTTA GO
- BARELY CONTROL
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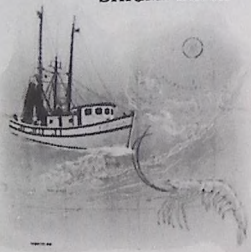
Parrot Head Club Logo embroidered on a 100% cotton ballcap. Available in White, Navy, or Tropical. \$15.00

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SHRIMPBOAT.



ST. SOMEWHERE



I'VE GOTTA GO



That same year *Changes in Latitude* is released and goes to #12 on the *Billboard Magazine* chart. 'Margaritaville' rises to #8 on *Billboard Pop Chart*, and becomes the definitive Jimmy Buffett song. *Changes* is also Jimmy's first platinum album, selling over one million copies.

Jimmy's second million seller in a row, *Son Of A Son Of A Sailor* is released in 1978. The now classic *You Had To Be There* live double album is also released and earns JB a gold album. This album also awakens people to Jimmy's natural on stage charisma. A Jimmy Buffett concert develops into much more than a live performance of studio songs. A Jimmy Buffett concert is an event. Vacations are planned, marriages are post-poned, schedules are totally revamped in order to make some time for an annual Buffett appearance.

More albums are being released, more Top 40 hits appear, *Volcano*, Jimmy's album recorded in 1979, also strikes gold. This album is recorded entirely at George Martin's AIR studios in Montserrat. This was one of the first major recordings to come out of AIR studios, which, since that time, has played host to many big name bands, the Rolling Stones among them.

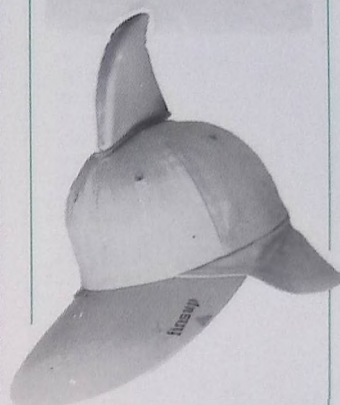
Jimmy discussed his career with Frederick Burger in a 1980 interview with *The Miami Herald*, "I'm as successful as I want to be. I've taken my career and a band and built them around my songwriting, to the point where I can be very successful financially and very gratified artistically and do what I do best, which is write songs and play on stage. I'd love to have a No. 1 album, but I don't conceive of it. I'd have to be a Fleetwood Mac or an Eagles, but I don't want to be them. I'd have to change my style, and I'm not going to do anything — other than what I do — to get it." Frederick Burger continues, "Enhancing his creative stature is one thing, losing another chunk of a relatively unfettered lifestyle is quite another. He possesses an overpowering realization that, as former manager Don Lite puts it, some things cost too much."

Throughout it all, Jimmy receives little or no radio exposure. Literally millions of albums are being passed across record counters nationwide based solely on word-of-mouth advertising from JB's growing legions. Radio, being what it is, has no room for an artist who's style can not be pigeon-holed. The 1985 Fall issue of *Country Hits* described it best, "All of the reviews written about Jimmy Buffett over the past several years have seemed to have a couple of things in common: first, the reviewers enjoy and admire Buffett and his music; and second, these same writers are at their wits end trying to come up with a nice pat label to pin on the man."

"Their recent attempts would indicate that Buffett is a 'unique, funky, easygoing', charismatic, enigmatic, colloquial, progressive, intellectual, maverick country-folk-rock singer / songwriter / performer.' Confused? Don't be. What it means is that it is a whole lot easier to listen to Jimmy Buffett's music than it is to describe it in words."



Photo by: Jeffrey Cardenas



CREST



BARELY CONTROL

1-800-COCOTEL

From a Rolling Stone interview with Chet Flippo: 'Tales of Buffett's past adventures abound, usually about his days as a down-and-out singer / songwriter in Nashville and Key West. Parties just seem to spring up around him. Tom Corcoran, a Key West photographer and writer who's been with Buffett since the beginning, "There's one thing that he's never told the press. He became a hero in the Caribbean a couple of years ago, when he saved two shipwrecked sailors. We were sailing from St. Maarten to Anguilla, where we spotted a bar. We decided to drop in for some (Heineken). But before we reached the island a freak storm hit us, the temperature dropped thirty degrees and the winds hit gale force. We had run out of fuel and had to just ride it out. Finally the storm passed, and the wind just died, which never happens in the Caribbean. We were dead in the water."

"Then we spotted these two old fishermen — the Vanderpool brothers — who'd been wrecked by the storm and were hysterical. Buffett got'em on board and we calmed 'em down. Still, no wind. Finally Buffett said, 'We'll go ashore and trade these two guys for some beers and some fuel.' So he and Groovy (Buffett's captain) put on their bright yellow foul-weather gear, grabbed a hand-held VHF radio, rowed the dinghy ashore and went into town. Buffett announced he had the Vanderpools."

"The locals just freaked. They gave him some fuel and a lot of beer, we took the Vanderpools home and the whole island turned out for a celebration. They paraded Buffett through town in the back of a pickup truck, with everybody cheering. He's amazing. He turns a shipwreck into a party."

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MAD MUSIC

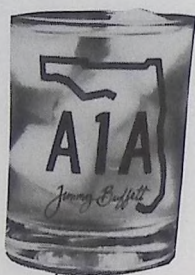
JUBILEE

HARPOON MAN

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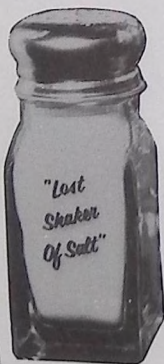
A black and white photograph of a stemmed glass, likely a brandy snifter or similar. The glass has a wide, shallow bowl and a long, slender stem. The word "Margaretville" is elegantly inscribed in a cursive script across the front of the bowl. The glass is set against a dark, textured background.



The idea of starting the Caribbean Soul clothing line grew out of the fact that concert touring has become synonymous with T-shirt sales. As a result of the poor quality and creatively mundane T-shirts being offered on the road, JB and partners Steve Humphrey and artist Mike LaTona formed Caribbean Soul. Over the past few years, Caribbean Soul has also diversified, adding drawstring shorts and pants, full button-down Camp shirts, as well as jackets and sweaters to the rapidly growing clothing line.



Margaritaville. A state of mind is now a state of being. How could some guy armed only with writers instruments; a pen and a legal pad, create all that is 'Margaritaville'? Imagination.



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INTERVIEW
WITH
PATRICIA WARD
BEIDERMAN

It was in the streets of Nashville that Buffett had his meeting with the late Buford (Walking Tall) Pusser. "I was just trying to find my rental car, and I happened to climb on his car. But I had some golf shoes with posts on them. I climbed on his car for a vantage point and he happened to come out, and he was not happy. So he grabbed me, he threw a trash can. I can't remember all the details, but he basically beat the hell out of me."

Jimmy Buffett's monthly newsletter/Margaritaville mail order. 12 issues for \$5.00. Outside U.S. 12 issues for \$10.00

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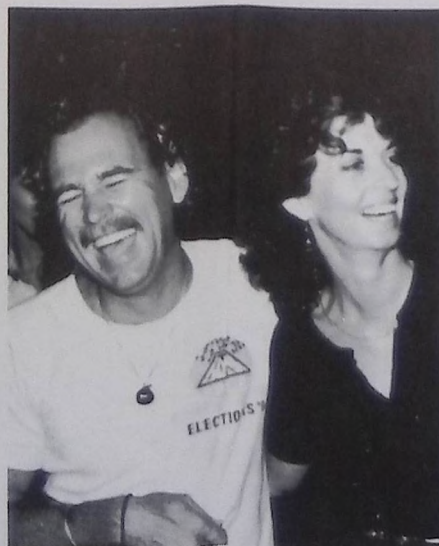
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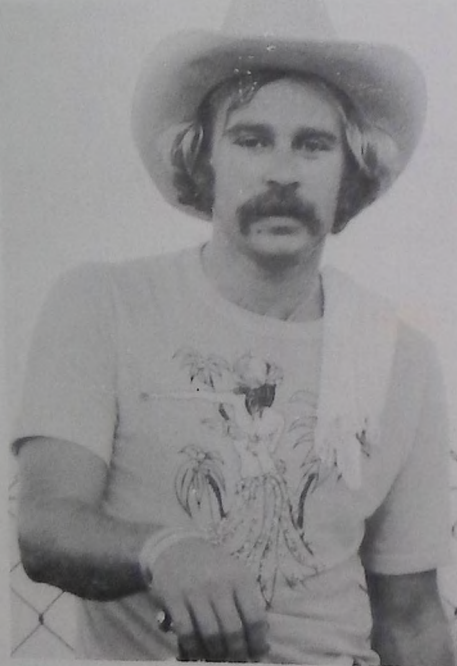
Jimmy and Margaritaville Store
Partner Sunshine Smith

Jimmy's first album set the stage for what was to become a very lengthy career in a business not known for longevity.

"He is as dedicated as ever to certain indecencies and shall we say reversible brain damage . . . he was among the first of the Sucking Chest Wound Singers to sleep on the yellow line . . . this throwback altarboy of Mobile, Alabama, brings spacey up-country tunes strewn with forgotten crabtraps, Confederate memories, chemical daydreams, Ipana vulgarity, ukulele madness and, yes, Larry, a certain sweetness. But there is a good deal to admire in Buffett's inspired evocations from this queerly amalgamated past most Americans now share. What Jimmy Buffett knows is that our personal musical history lies at the curious hinterland where Hank Williams and Xavier Cugat meet with somewhat less animosity that the theoreticians would have us believe."

Tom McGuanne

From the liner notes to *White Sport Coat and a Pink Crustacean* Jimmy's first nationally distributed album.



The COCONUT TELEGRAPH

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"Jimmy Buffett has written and sung songs which are now part of our collective memory. And he has made a world of open roads, sailboats, rental cars and bars set against a curiously romantic fleabag vista where people bunch up to face the empty sea. When Texans, coconuts, Florida, sharks, nymphomaniacs, Montana, volcanos and pirates land in one spot, we understand that worlds do in fact collide. Beyond that, Buffett has peopled this region with characters ranging from hammock dwellers dragged down by memories, fellow travelers with no memories, honored ancestors, poets, and smugglers run down by their own history like rabbits caught in the headlights. Finally, one of the figures in the drama is 'Jimmy Buffett' who is mostly, but not exactly Jimmy Buffett, a man with more camouflage than a Green Beret commissary."

Tom McGuanne

From the liner notes to *Songs You Know By Heart*
Jimmy Buffett's Greatest Hit(s) His 15th album.



Photo by: Jean Pagliuso