

## **The Flatlanders Hills & Valleys**

By Jonny Whiteside

The Lone Star state's resume of iconic characters spans a wild gamut — Ernest Tubb, Leatherface, Gov. Ann Richards — and chief among the West Texas division are singer-songwriters Joe Ely, Jimmie Dale Gilmore and



Butch Hancock, back in town again working as the Flatlanders, the offbeat unit with which they launched their professional careers almost 40 years ago. The Flatlanders were a gentle rabble who crafted an innovative type of post-Outlaw modern country that ranged in outlook and attitude from defiant honky-tonk desperation to interstellar philosophizing, all put over with a Texcentric emphasis and insurgent relish that's always colored the work of each man. Hitting the bandstand with their clutch of vintage classics and a slew of new numbers from the current Hills & Valleys disc, this three headed monster never fails to get the job done. The new set is a marvel in terms of their painstaking employ of symbolism and metaphor, and with country music roaring full throttle in the opposite direction, the trio have achieved what, for such full blown misfits, once seemed impossible: preservation of the peace and dignity of the idiom as a whole.