

The Flatlanders:

Three talented individuals make beautiful music together

By MARIO TARRADELL
Music Critic

Never have the dynamics of togetherness been so worthy of exploration as with the Flatlanders, the Texas music trio of Jimmie Dale Gilmore, Joe Ely and Butch Hancock.

While all have carved long, fruitful and lauded solo careers, something intriguing and perhaps magical happens when they unite to become the Flatlanders. The voices of three distinct talents merge seamlessly, without losing the core of the particular muses. So with a new Flatlanders CD just released on March 31, the roaring and rootsy *Hills and Valleys*, it's a great time to pose that togetherness question.

"Even in the times that our careers have been divergent professionally, we have all remained really close and spent a lot of time together as friends," Gilmore says by phone from a tour stop in Connecticut. "Sometimes people get the mistaken impression that we have gone different ways. When we get together to write, there's a real interesting dynamic because we are such completely different minds."

Those unique personalities join forces to conjure a cohesive musical entity that travels through country, rock, folk, Tex-Mex and blues.

"That's just a part of what continues to make it interesting to us," Gilmore says. "There's a wealth of inspiration and new information that comes from all three of us. Because of the way we work together we aren't afraid to

disagree with each other. It's real obvious to everybody that the stuff that we come up with together isn't similar to anything that we as individuals would have done."

Hills and Valleys is the third Flatlanders studio album since the trio returned to recording together with 2002's acclaimed *Now Again*, which was the first time Gilmore, Ely and Hancock had crafted a full CD since a botched debut disc that was haphazardly released in 1972. Those early recording sessions became widely available in 1990 when Rounder issued them with the title *More a Legend Than a Band*.

"Being together combines the fun of the music and the fun of hanging out with really good friends," Gilmore says. "Just as we've gotten older, we're also more stubborn, but we manage to figure out a way to work all that out with each other. The Flatlanders never was started as a commercial, big-business or professional enterprise. It happened because of our friendship and the mutual love of music. We never really have planned any aspect of what we've done together. It has been serendipity all along the way."

Traveling serendipity, if you will. Gilmore, Ely and Hancock – on their own or as the Flatlanders – have spent a lifetime

playing national (and international) concerts big and small. In fact, track No. 10 on *Hills and Valleys* is a Hancock composition titled "Thank God for the Road." It's a love letter to "the hubcaps and the headlights," "the mud flaps and the taillights."

A Flatlanders gig is scheduled for Dallas' House of Blues on June 5.

"We are all explorers," Gilmore says. "We are people that are curious about all kinds of things. We love to travel. We love



to meet different people. That song ... is one of Butch's masterpieces. It's a metaphor for life itself. That's the beauty I get from it.

"The entire thing is really like a big metaphor for the whole journey. Joe and Butch and I all have wanderlust from when we were very young. There are several aspects of the way we look at life that are strangely very similar. We all have this off-the-wall sense of humor. We like to move around."

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