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Texas gusher

COUNTRY CD REVIEW: Randy Rogers Band bidding to join the Lone Star State hit parade

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By MARIO TARRADELL / The Dallas Morning News

Add New Braunfels' Randy Rogers Band to the list of Texas country upstarts vying for national success. Just a Matter of Time, Mr. Rogers and company's debut for Mercury Nashville, finds him taking the same ambitious route as fellow Lone Star mainstays Pat Green and Jack Ingram.

But on Time - as on 2004's Rollercoaster, Mr. Rogers' last independently released album - he's got a secret weapon in Radney Foster. Mr. Foster, a Del Rio native with a knack for writing cool, melodic songs that walk the line dividing country from rock and pop, produced Time and co-wrote a few of its tracks. So the record sounds polished but not diluted. Mr. Foster knows what could work at mainstream country radio - after all, he's had a few hits - but he also understands artistic integrity.

Mr. Rogers does, too. Tellingly, the best cuts on Time are the most commercial as well. In fact, about half the dozen tracks are terrific. The first single, "Kiss Me in the Dark," penned by Mr. Foster and George Ducas, sports a killer chorus and an old-school, country-rock and modern-day honky-tonk ambience. Also, the title cut, with its reach-the-heavens chorus, is great. Mr. Rogers wrote that one with Nashville tunesmith Stephony Smith. Working with Mr. Foster on "Before I Believe It's True" proved genius. The song's got a moody melody and kicking drum work complementing Mr. Rogers' plaintive vocal performance. Other standouts include "If Anyone Asks," written with fellow Texan Drew Womack, and the closing "Whiskey's Got a Hold on Me."

Mr. Rogers - who began as just another frat boy with a guitar, a band and a dream - has sure come a long way. With each subsequent release, he's matured. Rollercoaster was a vast improvement over its predecessor, Like It Used to Be. And while the other half of Time, including the barroom rockers "You Could've Left Me" and "You Start Over Your Way," doesn't quite match the creative heights of "Kiss Me in the Dark" and "Before I Believe It's True," there's nothing mediocre here. All Mr. Rogers needs now is a radio hit to truly join the ranks of Mr. Green and Mr. Ingram. Then the 2006 Texas country invasion will be in full onslaught at mainstream country dials.