

# Arts Review

## Celebrating *The Changer and the Changed*

by Lee Russell

On the fifteenth anniversary of *The Changer and the Changed* and the eve of Cris Williamson's visit to Vermont, I want to pay tribute to this wonderful album that meant so much to me and to the woman (and women) who made it.

If you ask a lesbian to name the album that best symbolizes women's music, chances are good that she will name *The Changer and the Changed*. She probably owns a copy and still listens to it.

What makes this one album so special? Why does it represent women's music better than any other? I haven't asked anybody else this question, so I can only speak about what makes it special for me.

First of all, it is a beautiful album., unified in feeling. Every song fits and contributes to the whole. There is a perfect match between the voice, the words, and the music. The songs are wonderful, considered individually or as a whole.

*The Changer and the Changed* is a product of its time. In a concert I went to in

Boston in 1989, Cris talked about this album and its impact with some wonderment. She compared it to a high tide mark on a cliff. "You look at it and you say to yourself, 'Yes, once the water was that high.'"

And in 1975, the water was that high. The women's movement was still relatively new, fueled to a great extent by lesbian energy. Women formed consciousness-raising groups, talked furiously about their lives, debated, argued, and discovered that "sisterhood is powerful" and "the personal is political." Many women were willing to call themselves feminists; the right to legal abortion had recently been won; and it looked like we would win the ERA. Meg Christian had invented women's music, and a lesbian-feminist collective called themselves Olivia Records and began to record and distribute it. We were changers, and in the act of making the changes, we were changed.

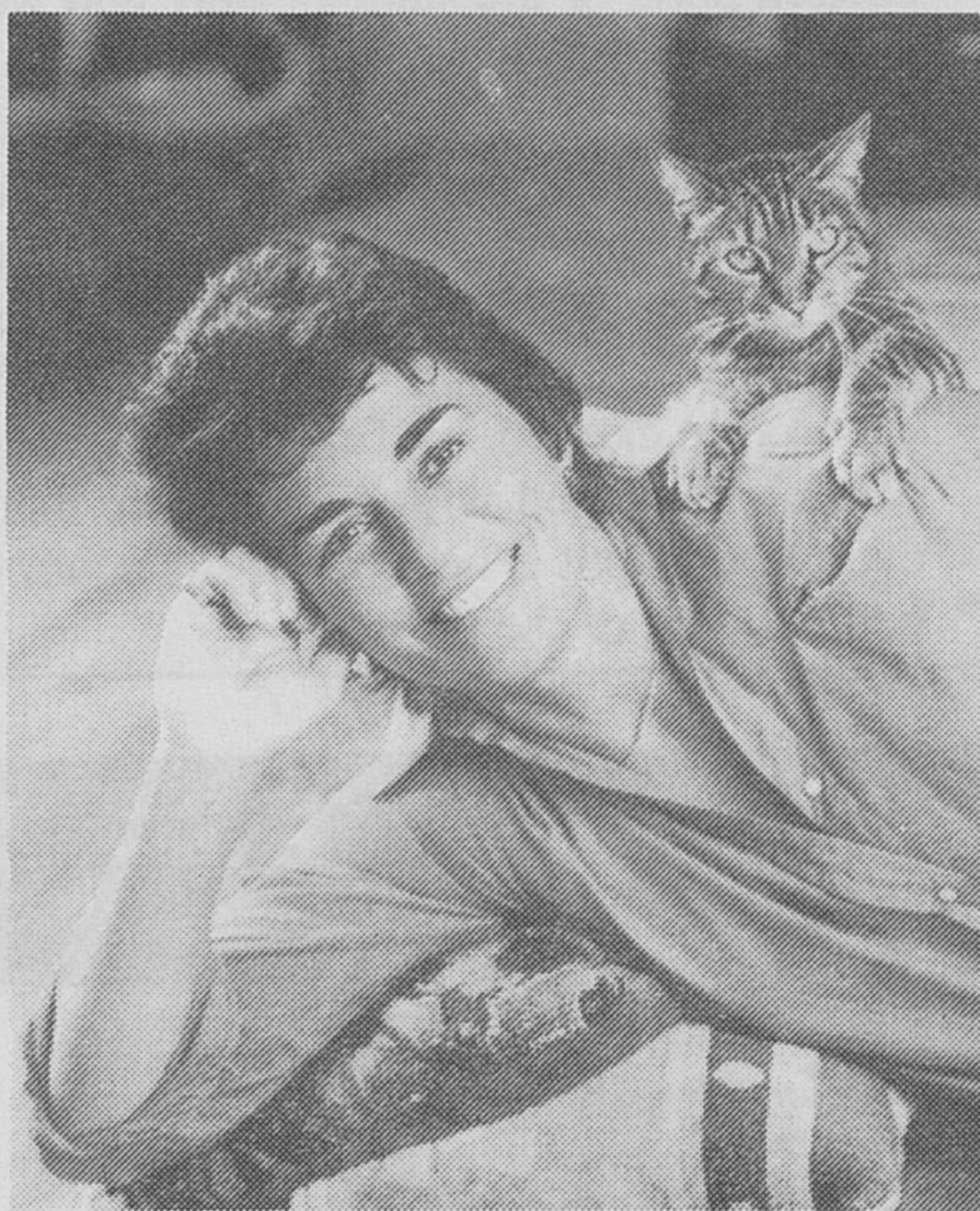
In 1975 it looked like change at this pace might last indefinitely. *The Changer and the Changed* was born from this feeling

and captures it. You can hear 1975 clearly in the chorus to "Song of the Soul." In 1990, the water is not as high, yet when I listen to the album now, I'm reconnected to that time. *The Changer* tells me that if the water was that high once, it can be so again.

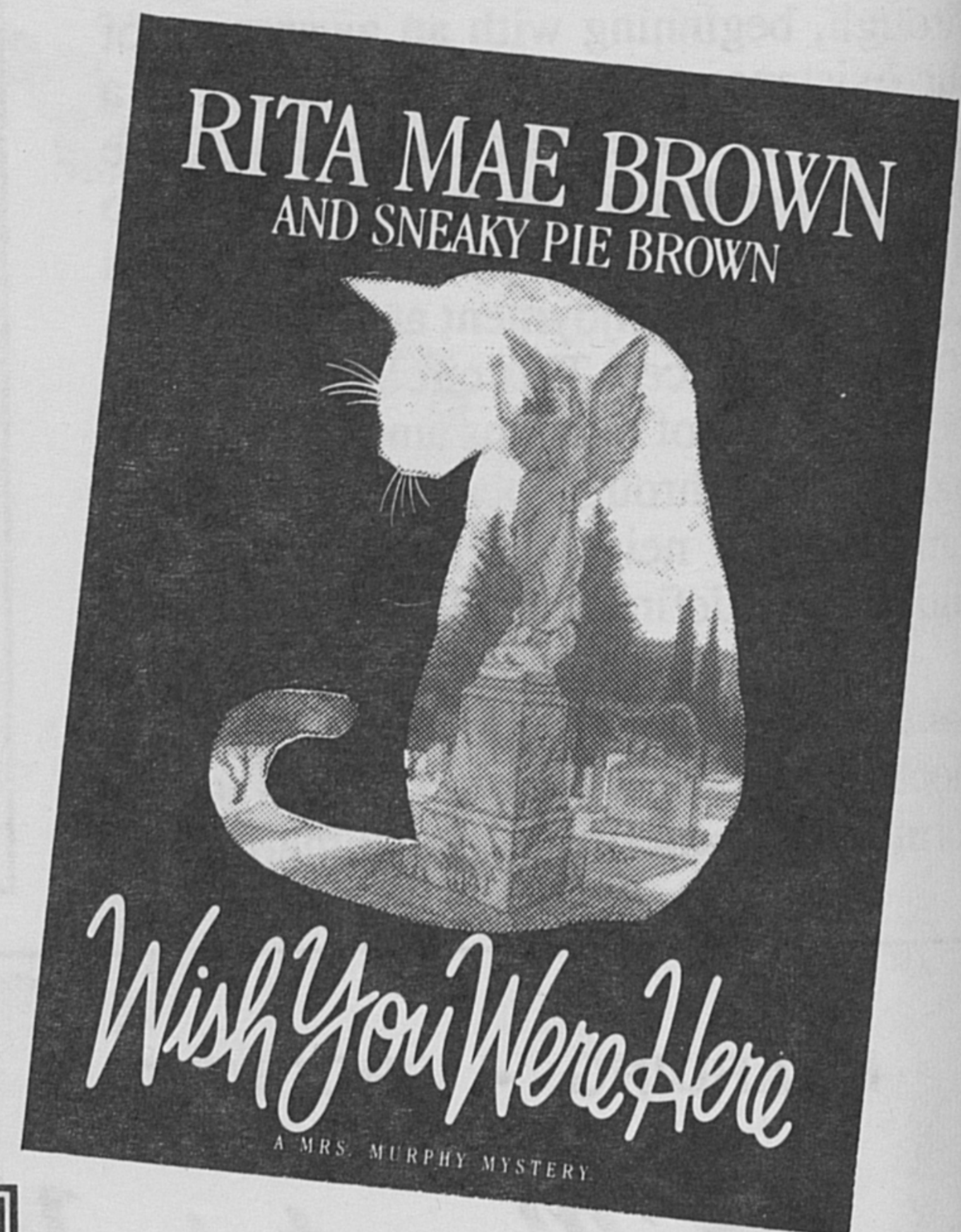
*The Changer* is a pure expression of a woman's world. Women made this album: wrote and sang all the songs, played the instruments, produced, engineered, mixed, distributed (and bought) it, at a time when this was extremely rare in the music industry (and still is). There were no men involved in its making. While important, this does not set it apart from other women's music albums. What is different is the world that Cris Williamson creates in this album. It is a woman's world, with a sensibility that is completely female. There are no men here, not even as a force to react or define oneself against. And you don't even notice at first that they are absent, because nothing seems to be missing. The world is complete and whole without them.

I have always thought of *The Changer*

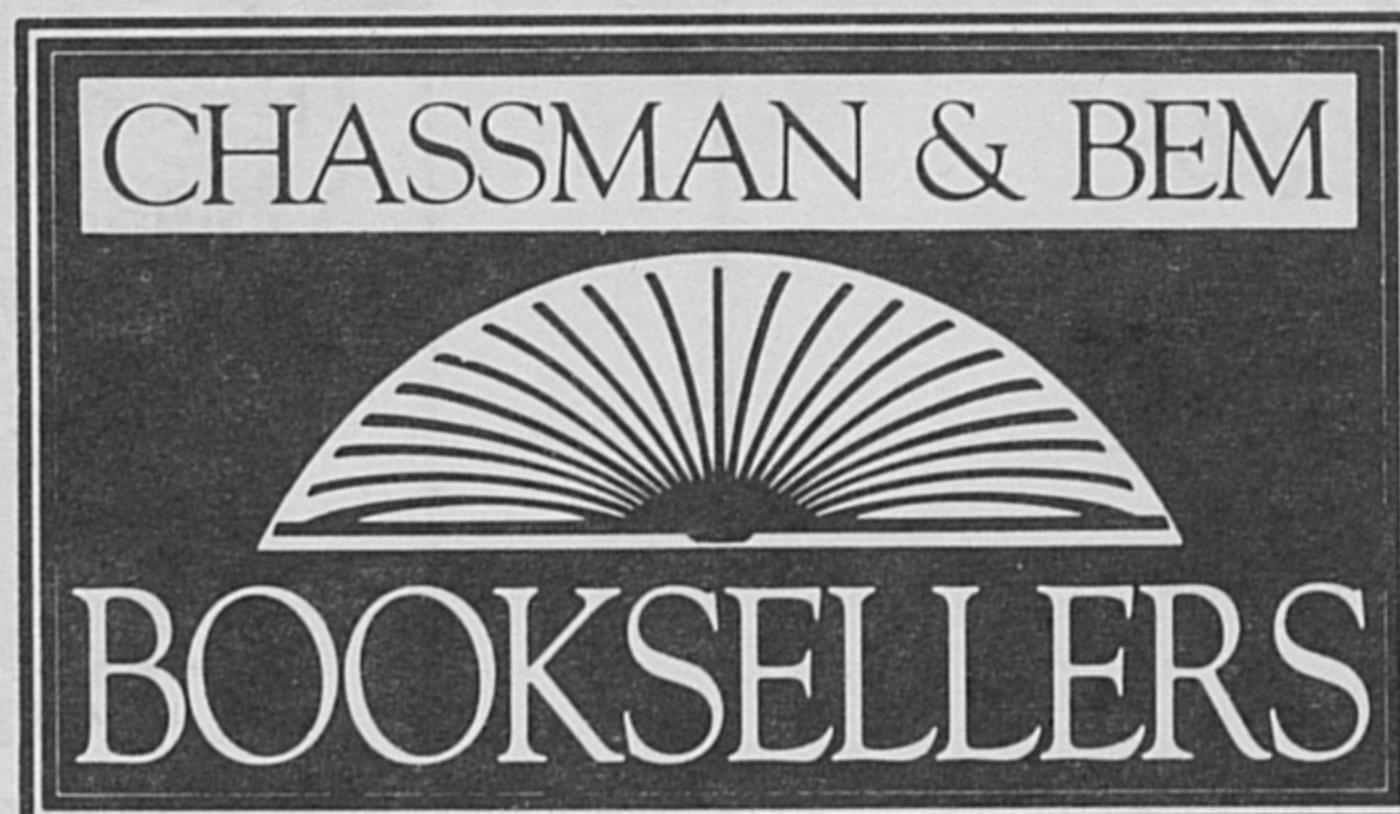
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