



This CD cover image released by Savoy Records shows, 'English Heart,' a release by Ronnie Spector. — AP

## Ronnie Spector honors UK peers with 'English Heart'

In 1964, Ronnie Spector toured Britain with the Ronettes just weeks before the Beatles arrived in America. "English Heart" is her tribute to that British Invasion, in turn influenced by her band and former husband Phil Spector's "Wall of Sound." While Spector is often cited for the power of her pipes, these 11 songs are styled more around subtlety and insinuation. Producer Scott Jacoby has wisely favored the feel of the 1960s originals over the sounds, evocation rather than imitation. There are exceptions, like the thumping drums and Farfisa organ on the Dave Clark Five tune "Because."

Conversely, electronic percussion on "You've Got Your Troubles" (originally by The Fortunes) lends a contemporary touch, contributing to the accommodating combination of old and new. If there's a jarring moment on the album, it's Spector substituting "baby" for "Lord" on the refrain of "Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood," which somehow manages to seem faster than the Animals' version when it is actually slower. Spector wisely covers smaller but superior US hits like Lulu's "Oh Me Oh My (I'm a Fool for You Baby)" and Sandie Shaw's "Girl Don't Come" instead of the usual smashes.

A version of the Rolling Stones' semi-obscure "I'd Much Rather Be With the Girls" with the daughter of her late sister (and fellow Ronette) Estelle Bennett and cousin Cindy Mizelle is pure joy. Hindered by an uneven recording career since the '70s, Spector also covers the Zombies, Beatles, Bee Gees and Kinks on "English Heart," and sounds ready to create some more memories of her own. — AP

## Review: Melissa McCarthy's 'The Boss' misses the mark

The search continues for a suitable showcase for the awesome talents of Melissa McCarthy outside of films directed by Paul Feig. The latest vehicle to give it a try, "The Boss," has a promising enough blueprint for comedy. McCarthy plays the red-haired, thoroughly turtlenecked Michelle Darnell, a ruthless, self-made executive whose Martha Stewart-like descent lands her in white-collar prison. Penniless upon release, she moves in with her former and much mistreated assistant Claire (Kristen Bell) and her daughter Rachel (Ella Anderson).

But, as in McCarthy's slipshod road movies "Identity Thief" and "Tammy," the material here isn't on her level, the laughs are largely cheap and once again, the hall-of-fame comic actress is stuck in a minor-league movie. Like "Tammy," "The Boss" was directed by Ben Falcone, McCarthy's husband and longtime collaborator, and written by them both. (Steve Mallory, who also dates back to their improve days at the Upright Citizens Brigade, also pitches in on the screenplay). In both films, the premise is solidly rooted in the common frustrations of thoughtless bosses and dead-end jobs. Tammy's midlife crisis was partially prompted by a meltdown with her fast-food manager (played by Falcone), but in "The Boss," Bell's Claire is the one suffering under tyrants.

### Business rival

Michelle is introduced as the 47th wealthiest woman in America, a perch she flaunts as a finance guru. At an arena rally, she descends to the stage on a bird with dollar bills showering her. She's Suze Orman times a hundred. Her downfall is plotted by a business rival, Renault (Peter Dinklage), who gets her locked up for insider trading. Claire, a single mother, finds another job with yet another uncaring supervisor (the underused Cecily Strong). But Michelle turns up on Claire's Chicago doorstep, looking for a place to stay.

The first sign of trouble in "The Boss" isn't the lack of a Bruce Springsteen cameo, but Michelle's first night on Claire's couch bed. When she sits down, the bed violently flings her high up on the wall, a crudely brutal, digitally faked moment of poorly calibrated slapstick that seems to exist only for the movie's trailer. Other such bits crop up, like a tumble down stone steps by Michelle, that feel like desperate reaches for laughs. After attending Rachel's Girl Scouts meeting, Michelle hits on an idea for a homemade brownie operation that will teach young women more capitalistic ideals and give them a percent of the profits, too.

### Sweetness and crassness

By even the standards of redemptive occupations in comedies, it's a thin concept. But Michelle's rival troupe of treat-selling girls begins to take off, bringing back all of Michelle's hard-nosed business tactics. A street fight between the girls follows, as does the expected lesson about family and generosity. "The Boss" is tighter than "Tammy" and it's not without laughs. With few supporting players providing much humor (Kathy Bates, as Michelle's mentor, is entirely squandered), McCarthy shoulders the film.

And she remains a captivating, unpredictable force in even a mediocre film, with a rare gift for both bombastic and humble characters, sweetness and crassness, physical comedy and verbal spats. But so far, those gifts have only been fully put to use by Feig. Their films together - "Bridesmaids," "The Heat" and "Spy" - are a class above the rest. Thankfully, their next one, "Ghostbusters," is due this summer. "The Boss," a Universal Pictures release, is rated R by the Motion Picture Association of America for "sexual content, language and brief drug use." Running time: 99 minutes. Two stars out of four. — AP



This image released by Universal Studios shows Kristen Bell, front row second from left, and Melissa McCarthy, center, in a scene from, 'The Boss.' — AP



This file photo shows Willie Nelson (left), Kris Kristofferson (second left), Merle Haggard (second right) and Blake Shelton (right) performing on stage during the 56th Grammy Awards at the Staples Center in Los Angeles, California.

## Country's original outlaw Merle Haggard dies at 79

Country music legend Merle Haggard, an outlaw in both song and life who gave voice to the hippie era's disaffected conservatives before moderating his views, died Wednesday on his 79th birthday. Haggard, who had recently returned to tour despite frequent illness, died following a pneumonia at his home in northern California, a representative said. His son, fellow musician Ben Haggard, wrote on Facebook that his father predicted a week ago that he would die on his birthday and that "he took his last breath surrounded by family and friends."

Tributes poured in from across the music world for Haggard, who released a staggering amount of work over six decades with more than 30 songs that topped the US country charts. "We've lost one of the greatest writers and singers of all time. His heart was as tender as his love ballads. I loved him like a brother," singer Dolly Parton said in a statement. Willie Nelson, a collaborator of Haggard who is the best-known living star of the outlaw country genre, wrote on Facebook that the late singer was "my brother, my friend."

Haggard had the greatest impact with his 1969 hit "Okie from Muskogee," which emerged as an anthem of sorts for the counterculture to the counterculture who had become so prominent among US youth. The song-its title reference to a slang for a person from the conservative Plains state of Oklahoma, in which Muskogee is a small city-tells of pride in the US flag and the war against communism in Vietnam. "We don't smoke marijuana in Muskogee / We don't take no trips on LSD / We don't burn no draft cards down on Main Street / But we love living right and being free," he sings in the opening lines.

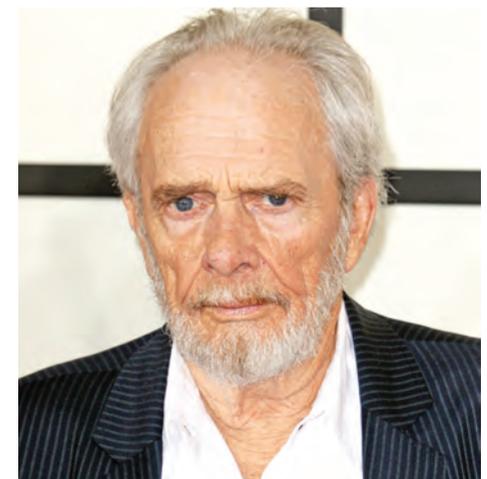
### Transition from conservative image

While the song became a rallying cry in the US culture wars, Haggard later described "Okie from Muskogee" as an attempt to understand heartland America rather than a statement of his own principles. He became a critic of the more recent war in Iraq and has been an avowed supporter of

Democratic presidential hopeful Hillary Clinton, even writing a song in 2007 for her earlier campaign with the line, "Let's put a woman in charge."

"If a guy doesn't learn anything in 50 years, there's something wrong with him," he told Men's Journal last year. In another recent interview, Haggard voiced solidarity with African Americans protesting against police brutality and said the former Confederacy country music's home turf had not addressed the Civil War. Married five times and the singer of many love ballads, Haggard became best known for outlaw country songs about run-ins with the law—a subject matter he knew first-hand.

Deeply affected by his father's death when he was a child, Haggard learned guitar as a youth and became involved in petty crime, landing in California's San Quentin prison for burglary and put in solitary confinement for brewing moonshine. He credited a 1958 performance at the prison by legend Johnny Cash—who turned a later concert at San Quentin into a celebrated album—with inspiring him to pursue music. —AFP



File photo shows Merle Haggard as he arrives on the red carpet for the 56th Grammy Awards at the Staples Center.