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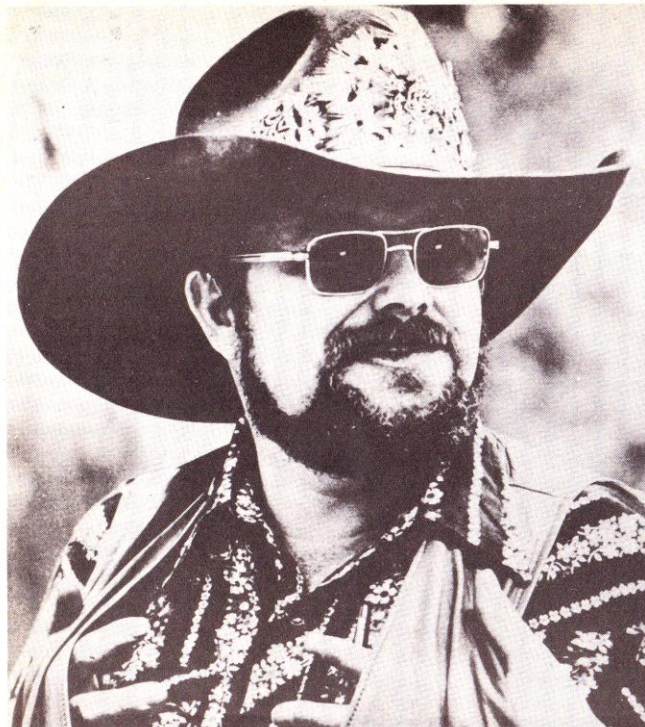
Number 10
Vol. 2
May 12-May 25

PRICE 35p
EVERY OTHER
WEDNESDAY

WHERE DID THAT SONG COME FROM?

Song writing and composing is an uncertain business, for who knows what public taste is until money has been spent and the title audience-tested? Michael Martin Murphey has experienced both success and failure. And one thing he does know ... You never can tell.

BY ARTHUR WOOD



Charlie Daniels was one of the musicians on "Swans against the sun" as was John Denver and Willie Nelson.

The seemingly endless list of song titles that have cluttered the Country scene since, say Hank Williams burst into public favour by nasal-voicing his way into the Hall of Fame may suggest that putting words and music together for public approval, not to say an income on which the words and music — man can live, is a fairly simple task.

We hear of people who composed smash hits in half an hour, and there is one famous lyric writer extant who has said: "If I can't get the musical line and a

verse and chorus down in three quarters of an hour, than I abandon the idea and look for another".

The inference is ease and simplicity. It is true, of course that musical money spinners have appeared to the writer as if by inspiration, and have been dashed off on envelopes or cigarette packets to provide a lifetime's income for the fortunate creator.

RARE INSTANCES

But these instances are rare and do not conform to the usual pattern of sweat, effort and risk endured by those who seek to encapsulate their thoughts in the deceptively simple disciplines that must be obeyed in order to write a 'Gold'!

James Michael Murphey, of Irish descent, has done it just the once in 1975 when his single 'Wildfire' peaked at number 2 in the Billboard charts and stayed there for two weeks to eventually sell in excess of two million copies.

Before, and after then, this youngish Texan has penned his way through interesting failures and modest successes. There is no doubt that there is a rich strand of creativity in him, but his is a wayward talent that leads him through many musical influences. And the poet in him does not always provide him with the words to suit the public modd of the moment.

Yet those in the 'trade' and in the 'know' retain their faith in Michael, for once a 'Gold', there is always the chance of a second time round.

In 1971, producer Bob Johnstone demonstrated his commercial judgement in Michael's ability and worked out a deal with A&M Records. 'Geronimo's Cadillac' was the result. The tracks were put down in Columbia Recording Studios, Nashville and strings from London were added later.

The album was released in 1972, and though it sold well in Texas and the South Western States, A&M failed to break through to sales on a National level. But the title track with its subject of injustices shown to the American Indian remains one of Murphy's best known songs.

A SMASH HIT?

The imposition of family attitudes and hereditary traits influence many human beings, and creative people more than most. The strong element of Gospel 'feel' in the majority of the songs on the album undoubtedly reflect Michael's religious upbringing and there's sound merit in that.

But a smash hit? It didn't happen. He wrote eleven songs on the Album. The lyric and music lines were good. They projected originality and creative composition. But in general, the public were indifferent.

The poet/composer had not struck the common chord.

In 1972 Michael spent no more than four days recording his second Album — one day longer than Geronimo's Cadillac — and in 1973 its title 'Cosmic Cowboy Souvenirs' slid into the Billboard Top 200 for a brief period.

But at least the sales were National. More of the commercial writer began to show through and the Murphey poetical streak was pushed into the background, though the imp of creative mischief in him revealed itself in the slightly strange 'Prometheus Busted' and the Polynesian influenced 'Honolulu'.

The sales boys shook their heads, and when Bob Johnston offered A&M Michael's third album they turned him down. Commercial faith is one thing. Profit and loss another.

If the public doesn't react — neither do the recording companies.

THE SINGLE, 'WILDFIRE'

However, a Stateside deal with Epic Records and an EMI release in Britain for the third album demonstrated the belief that Michael would come good somewhere along the line, thought as yet there was little response from the public to justify it. And in 1974 the public's non-mass acceptance of Michael's work seemed to suggest that he lacked the common touch.

'Michael Murphey', the



Tanya Tucker.



Bob Dylan, Bob Johnston produce "Nashville Skyline" and recognised Murphey's talent.

album's title contained six songs written by the man himself and like its predecessors it failed to attract large sales and it was the last album to contain a slightly Gospel flavour.

Then came the year of Michael's 'Gold'. An earlier release in 1975, 'Blue Sky — Night Thunder' indicated a renewed interest in the life of the American Indian, both past and present, and though by now his work was pointing the way towards success, it was not Blue Sky that took the public's fancy. It took co-writer Larry Cansler and the single 'Wildfire' to do that.

Nationally and Internationally the sales went on until well beyond the coveted two million mark.

The years of sweat, effort and risk had begun to pay off. His professional craftsmanship and poetical streak had provided him with the bread of income and the satisfaction of knowing that his creative song spinning was not merely unimportant words and unimpressive music lines. They could evoke a common response. They could touch the heart and emotions of over two million people.

The Old Tin Pan Alley adage of 'Record another one, just like the other one' seemed to ring true when 'Swans Against The Sun'

appeared. But the public didn't think so. If 'Swans' was just like the other one, then the sales sheets didn't record it. Though the single 'Renegade' made number 39 on the charts in 1976 while the album hoisted itself to a respectable 44.

But then 'Mansions on the Hill' by Hank Williams and Fred Rose, plus 'Buffalo Gun' by Richard Dean was included on the 'Swans' track, so it may be that Michael was hedging his musical bets.

Later the same year 'Flowing Free Forever' was released. Reviewers weren't exactly ecstatic about the offering and the public demonstrated a remarkable indifference towards a number of his well penned songs. The touch was missing again.

NOMINATED FOR OSCAR

When the griping pangs of failure grip the creator he often seeks a change of direction in order to re-establish his creativity. Michael Murphey looked for new horizons. He composed ten songs which featured a much more distinct rock sound with, at times, direct jazz overtones. The album 'Lone Wolf' produced by John Boylan was relatively uninspired and caused not too many ripples

of interest throughout the Record Trade.

The following year, 79, saw the release of 'Peaks, Vallies, Honky Tonks and Alleys', a mixture of studio recordings and a live concert at the Palamino Club in Hollywood. There was also a lack of new Murphey songs on the tracks and the music in which he was involved had discarded its Rock rhythm base for a softer more melodic approach. Here was Murphey yet again seeking public response by change of styles and musical approaches. But the lack of originality also posed the question as to whether creatively he was drying up.

WILL O' THE WISP

The album did little more than trickle off the counters and, well aware that he could no longer find public reaction, Michael buried himself on a small ranch near Taos in New Mexico. He composed the sound track music for a documentary entitled 'The Divided Trail', and produced and directed by Jerry Aaronson, the film was eventually nominated for an Oscar.

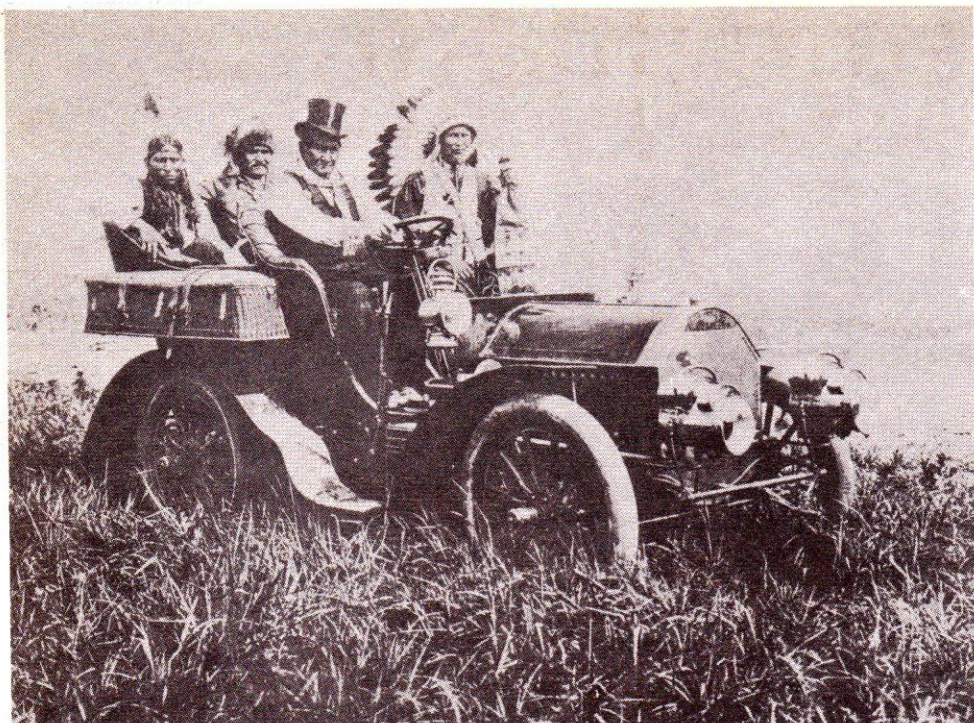
Technically, at least, Michael was still capable of producing acceptable music. Becoming aware of another medium for his writing talents, he began writing film scripts. Collaborating with Michael Kane, one story was taken up by Lord Grade's now defunct film Company and was made into 'The Hard Country'.

But again he lost his musical way. 'Take It As It Comes' duetted by Michael and Katy Moffat did make the Top 100 on the Country Charts last August, but his other composition 'Hard Partyin' Country Darlin'' actually posed his credibility as a future recording artist. It was less than unremarkable.

Sometimes his friends and commercial associates despair for Michael. His skills are evident, but his rich vein of creativity often leads him away from the common reward of public reaction. It makes him a poet/composer of ups and downs. One who seldom knows how his work will be received for to find the creative way to overwhelming response is will o' the wisp elusive.

And it's just as the man said:

If it's got soul — write it; if it's got music — play it. Then all you need is an audience that likes it ... yeah, an audience that likes it ●



Geronimo and Cadillac

IF IT'S GOT SOUL, WRITE IT — IF IT'S GOT MUSIC, PLAY IT. THEN ALL YOU NEED IS AN AUDIENCE THAT LIKES IT. YEAH, AN AUDIENCE THAT LIKES IT . . .

DIRT BAND

Jealousy. Jealousy / Too close For Comfort/Fire In The Sky/ Love Is The Last Thing / Crossfire / Circular Man / Catch The Next Dream / So You Run / Forget It / Easy Slow. (Liberty LBG 30345).

This band seem to have been going for ever in one form or another, and have in their time, produced some classic albums. They have, however, never meant a light, chartwise in Britain, and maybe it is too vain a hope that this record will bring them some overdue recognition.

I've had this album on the turntable most of the day, which is a surefire indication that it is one of those which will stay on may playlist of favourites for quite some time.

The most recent recruit to the band, Bob Carpenter, has had a hand in writing nine of the ten tracks on the album, and most of them are memorable.

'*Jealousy*' open the album with some hard biting guitar riffs and is taken at a rate of knots, with a Jeff Hanna vocal which is perfectly balanced by Rosemary Butler's soulful harmonies.

Jimmie Fadden's harmonica and Al Garth's saxophone break in the middle of '*Fire In The Sky*', makes for one of the best tracks on the album with lead vocals shared by Hanna and Garth's old boss, Kenny Loggins.

Side two opens with '*Circular Man*' another



favourite of mine, although '*Catch The Next Dream*' (sadly not a band original) which follows, has the best potential for being a chart

single.

'*Easy Slow*' which closes the album features some really burning banjo work by old hand, John McEwen, with the

melody taken at a pace suggested by the title.

Overall, one of the best packages I've heard for ages, although not strictly country

rock throughout. I hope the album does well for them, as it's obvious they put some real effort into this one ●

ARTHUR WOOD

WILD HEART of the YOUNG

Karla Bonoff. CBS AL 37444 Import. Personally / Please Be The One / I Don't Want To Miss You / Even If / Just Walk Away / Gonna Be Mine / Wild Heart Of The Young / It Just Takes One / Dream.

By no stretch of the imagination could the music on this album be considered country, although the lady concerned has a few tenuous connections. I've lived with this album for two weeks now, loved it from the moment I first heard it, but dallied, regarding reviewing it for *CMW* for many reasons. Anyway, here goes.

The presentation is firmly set in the California, 'Soft Rock' mould. Produced by hubby, Kenny Edwards, it features the L.A. session cream in Messrs Kunkel, Kortchmar, Gold and Payne. Edwards kicked off his career with Linda Ronstadt in the Stone Poneys, latterly supplying the bass lines in that lady's road band. Linda Ronstadt's 1975 album, 'Hasten Down

The Wind' featured three of Karla's songs; Linda was probably one of the first artists to record Karla's work. 'Wild Heart of the Young' is in fact, Karla's third solo album and from the pop/reggae intro on Paul Kelly's 'Personally' through to the languid and beautiful track, 'Dream', which she penned herself, this is an ideal late night album which is chock full of class songs.

Karla penned the remaining seven songs on the album, one with Kenny Edwards.

Irrespective of the eternal reviewers nightmare of having to place music on an album in a specific compartment, when it comes down to it, there are only two types of music, good and bad.

Personally I'd place Karla's work in the former category. Anyway, give her a try; there's even a rumour circulating that CBS will be releasing it here later in the year. ● ARTHUR WOOD