

COUNTRY MUSIC WORLD

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'I'D HAVE TO BE CRAZY' SAYS STEVEN FROMHOLZ

On his current Stateside album (albeit over two years old), titled, 'Live', Steven Fromholz sums up his charisma when he tells the audience, 'Some folks come to hear me sing my songs and some folks come to hear me tell my stories and some folks just come to watch me drink. Sometimes they'll make a book on how long I can stand up for the evening. I rarely fall over, and if I do, I never fall into the audience.'

Born in Temple mid-Texas in 1945, Fromholz attended High School in Denton, which is in the north of the State. By 1963, Steve had moved to the North Texas State University where he quickly formed and became first president of the college Folk Club. Around this time Fromholz began to compose a number of songs and he would play in "pick up" groups with fellow students, Michael Murphey and Travis Holland. He married his first wife while still at college and she gave him a banjo as a wedding present.

Although his college career was short lived, Fromholz's musical association with Michael Murphey continued for a number of years, and they played together both in the "Dallas Country Jug Band" and "The Michael Murphey Trio".

In 1965 Steven received his draft notice and spent the next three years in the US Navy, although he claims that he was discharged prematurely, because the authorities reckoned he was crazy. His first marriage broke up while he was in the Services and his wife went off to Alaska, taking their daughter, Darcy, with her. Most of his tour of duty was spent in California and when Steven returned to civilian life, he quickly picked up the threads of his musical career.

HIS WIFE WENT NORTH TO ALASKA

Initially he worked the San Francisco and Los Angeles club circuits in a duo called, Buffalo Chips. Being by nature, at that time, a rather restless soul, Steven then settled in Colorado, and worked with several duos and trios, while there.

It was while working in a duo called Frummox" with folk singer, Dan McCrimmon, that Fromholz had his first experience of recording work. Signed to the ABC Probe label their only album, titled "From here to there" was released in 1969. Unfortunately the album received little promotion and sank without trace. It did, however, receive a British release, and a number of copies of the American version, with the double cover, turned up in bargain bins a few years back.

The eight track album remains extremely listenable and contains four of Fromholz's own compositions, including the excellent, "Texas Trilogy" which can best be described as an evocation in words and music of the town portrayed in Peter Bogdanovich's mid-Seventies film, "The Last

Picture Show". "Song for Stephen Stills" another track on the album turned out to have a rather prophetic title, but more of that in a moment. Frummox continued as a working unit till May of 1971 but, according to Fromholz, McCrimmon was always painfully shy in front of an audience.

Early in the summer of 1971 Stephen Stills was putting together a band to promote his second solo album, "Stephen Stills II" and Fromholz was invited to join the group. Fromholz quickly accepted Stills' offer and spent the rest of the year working with the band.

NESMITH SIGNED HIM UP

They came over to Britain to 'get it together' in the countryside at the former home of Ringo Starr; a 350 year old house in Elstead, Surrey, which Stills purchased. (Incidentally, during his visit to these shores, Fromholz was featured in the Stills' documentary which Tony Cash produced for BBC television).

A highly successful fifty-two date tour of the States followed, and Stills, after all the ego hassles previously encountered with Messrs Crosby, Nash and Young, became extremely keen to continue working with a regular road band. The band metamorphosed into Manassas and Fromholz worked on the initial recording sessions for their first (double) album. It would appear that too much, "sex, drugs and rock n'roll" finally got to Fromholz though, and he quit the band before the album was finished.

According to Fromholz he spent the next year recovering from the excesses of working in "the fast lane", but he did continue his musical career by forming a short lived, and rather eccentrically named group called Captain Duck and the Farmer's Electric Co-op Boys. It took fellow Texan and acquaintance, Michael Nesmith, formerly with the Monkees, to persuade Fromholz to go back to the recording studios.

After the demise of the Monkees, Nesmith had recorded, "The Wichita Train Whistle Sings" album for Dot Records in 1968. Subsequently Nesmith signed with RCA, forming initially the First National Band (which featured John Ware, later the drummer with Emmylou's Hot Band), and they recorded some excellent Country Rock albums in the early Seventies. Nesmith, however, was, and has remained, something of a musical entrepreneur, and he persuaded Jac Holzman, who at the time was head of Elektra Records, to help set up the satellite Countryside

label in 1972.

Nesmith signed up Fromholz and they began work on Steve's first solo album in 1973. Titled "How long is the road to Kentucky" the album was recorded at the Countryside Studios in Sepulveda, California. Scheduled for release late in the summer of 1973, it was withdrawn within days of its release, because Nesmith's ally, Holzman, was promoted to the chairmanship of Warner Communications. David Geffe who took control of the Elektra/Asylum labels had little interest in the "West Coast Country" experiment, and Fromholz's album was shelved.

Fromholz went to LA and tried to persuade Warners lawyers to release the album, but all to no avail. He returned to Colorado, where he spent the winter, and managed to console himself by coaching a boys' basketball team.

Although the album has officially remained locked up in Elektra's vaults, it is possible to locate tapes of the album and with certain reservations, it is worth the effort. Nesmith indelibly left his mark on the 'Kentucky' album and stand out tracks are, 'Sweet Janey', a love song for his second wife; "Dear Darcy" an open letter to a daughter... he hadn't seen in years, plus the mournful album title track.

HAPPY GO LUCKY

Fromholz moved from Colorado to Austin in 1974 and worked for a time for Moon Hill Management, who had also had Steve on their books as a performer. Chalice Productions signed Steve to a contract in mid 1975 and his recordings were leased to Capitol; the first official Fromholz solo album being wryly titled, "A Rumour In My Own Time" was released early the following year. With the help of some "heavy" friends like Willie Nelson and Company, Red Rhodes, Lost Gonzo Band (Jerry Jeff Walker's former road crew) and John Sebastian (ex-Lovin' Spoonful), on the backing tracks, there was a solid backbone to the album. Sebastian's song, "She's a Lady" was the only composition Fromholz didn't write on the ten track album. "Dear Darcy" gets another airing, and Fromholz supplied his own interpretation of his song, "I'd Have To Be Crazy". Fellow Texan, Willie Nelson recorded the latter song for his 1976, "The Sound In Your Mind" album, and when the track was issued as a single, it made the Country charts. Steve now performs the song as a "medley of his hit".

Despite the promise shown by the "Rumour" album, megasales were not forthcoming and



Crosby Stills and Nash Fromholz had a happy year with Stills new band.

Fromholz remained at his best in front of an audience, as an "Austin City Limits" show of the time proved. His story telling was supreme, and with throw away lines like, "better late than nervous" his dry humour was well to the fore.

His second Capitol album, "Frolicking In the Myth" was released the following year and was a weak follow up to "Rumour". It seems ironic to me that Capitol should choose to give Steve's second album a British release, when "Rumour" was obviously the better album. The trouble with the "Myth" album was that on the first side, Steve was well up to par with his folk-tinged stories, including a new version of "Sweet Janey"; while for some unknown reason, Side Two tried to present Steve as a Rock n' Roll singer, and that is something that he most definitely is not. The result was strained and just doesn't "hold water" in any way whatsoever.

The 1977 Peter Fonda/Susan St. James movie, "Outlaw Blues" saw Steve diversify into film work and he also supplied some songs for the soundtrack album. Steve can be heard on three songs: "Beyond These Walls" (penned by Hoyt Axton who also produced the album), plus, "A Little More Holy" and "Everybody's Goin' On The Road", which he wrote himself.

Them good old boys from Texas certainly stick together because, cast adrift by Capitol, Steve was soon signed up by Willie Nelson for his now defunct, "Lone Star" label. Initially featured on the Lone Star "Sic Pack" compilation album, Steve's own album, "Jus' playing' along" was released in 1978. It was undoubtedly a vast improvement on the second Capitol album, but my reservations lay in the fact that we had further versions of, "A Little More Holy" and "Texas Trilogy". As far as writing new songs was concerned, Steve certainly wasn't prolific.

HONDO DIED LATE IN '76

Side one opened with the happy-go-lucky, "She's everybody's baby but mine", and the "up" feeling was maintained all the way through till the closing chords of "A Little More Holy". The album, needless to say, didn't shatter any chart records.

By this stage, Steve had parted company with Moon Hill and as far as possible, he made an attempt to manage his own career. The Lone Star label folded soon the album was released and Fromholz got to thinking he should record and issue his own albums in future.

Fromholz "Live" was recorded

at Steamboat Springs 1974, a club in Austin, Texas and was released on Steve's Felicity label in late 1979. Produced by his old pal, Craig Hillis, who was once a member of Michael Murphey's road band, the album really captured Fromholz in full flight and remains one of the best live recordings that I have heard. The album comprised ten tracks, half of which had appeared on earlier albums.

Sad to say, apart from his appearance, along with artists like Marcia Ball, Gary P. Nunn and Rusty Weir, on the second Felicity album, "The Austin Christmas Collection Vol. 1", Fromholz has been fairly inactive on the recording scene in the last few years. Youngblood Records issued a new single late last year, which featured Steve's composition, "Hondos's Song", sung as a duet with Willie Nelson.

Hondo (Crouch) was a character of some repute in Texas, having started the Luckenbach Enterprise in the early Seventies along with co-owner, Betty Morgan. Much revered by the contemporary musicians of Texas, (Jerry Jeff Walker recorded his "Viva Terlingua" album in Luckenbach in 1973). Hondo died in late 1976 but not before his fame had spread far beyond the boundaries of Texas and America. ●

ARTHUR WOOD



Steven Fromholz.

APACHE-APACHE

Atlantic ATL K 50826. Please Don't Stop The Music / And You Know / Cold Fire / Suzanne / Working Man / JB's Open House / Marathon / Down On The Corner / Born To Raise Hell (Children Of The Night.

A couple of years back, a five piece band from Georgia called the Outlaws, made quite an impact when they first appeared on the scene. They dealt a heavy brew of blues, boogie and Southern rock 'n' roll lightly laced with country rock.

Apache are a five piece band who hail from the New York

area, and they remind me, in many ways of the Outlaws.

The band's lead vocalist, Joe Messina, had a hand in writing all ten tracks here, which vary from raunchy rockin' numbers like, *'Born To Raise Hell'* and *'Cold Fire'* to melodic ballads like *'Suzanne'*.

The opening track, *'Please Don't Stop The Music'* complete with backing by a children's choir, is reminiscent of the 'pomp and circumstance' rock, currently being churned out by bands like Foreigner and REO Speedwagon. ●ARTHURWOOD