

## Michael Peter Smith – Bio

Michael Peter Smith was born in Newark, New Jersey on September 7<sup>th</sup> 1941, and raised initially in the Oranges - West Orange, East Orange and Orange. A Grade A student in high school, particularly in English, classroom music lessons bored Smith. Michael told me a decade ago, *"We were forced to read notes and be in a Glee Club."* When Elvis Presley made his television debut, Smith's interest in contemporary music was ignited. Gene Vincent, the Everly Brothers and Dion and the Belmonts became favourites. Fifteen years old and living in Little Falls, Michael joined in a doo-wop trio. Purchasing his first guitar for \$5.00, Smith next turned his attention to calypso [Harry Belafonte] and folk [Kingston Trio] music. Two years later, Smith was working in a factory that manufactured navigational parts for missiles, and in his spare time played in a local rock'n'roll band. Michael, aged nineteen, enrolled in College in St. Petersburg, Florida and went on to form a Kingston styled folk group. He also appeared in local coffeehouses as a solo performer.

Still resident in Florida, aged twenty-one, Smith formed a duo with Canadian Sam Cancilla and they toured venues throughout the States for some eighteen months. When the duo split up, Michael scored a residency at The Flick in Miami. Concurrently members of what became Spanky and Our Gang, performed at "The Flick" as solo acts. Invited to join the group, Michael passed, but the Spankies cut three of Smith's songs - "It Ain't Necessarily Bird Avenue," "Commercial" and "Join The Klan." By his fourth year at "The Flick," Michael was working with Ron Kickasola and Barbara Barrow, and they initially called themselves The Baker Street Regulars. Moving to Los Angeles the trio appeared regularly at the "Ice House" in Pasadena, but by the time Decca released their only album, they were called Juarez.

**"Juarez"** took eight months to complete, and the collection featured twelve Michael Peter Smith originals. Decca remixed the tracks, and Michael's opinion remains *"We thought it was awful."* The trio broke up and Michael and Barbara, now married, formed Juarez, the rock group. *"We got a bass player, a guitar player and a drummer from the San Francisco area and went out on the road."* By the mid-seventies the Smith's were working as a duo and they relocated to Detroit. Local audiences had always been appreciative when Juarez played the Michigan city. Signed to Bell Records, the pair cut **"Mickey And Babs Get Hot"** in New York.

In Detroit the Smith's appeared in a theatre production **"Personals"** for two years, during the mid/late seventies. Backtracking a little, in 1972, the late Steve Goodman recorded Smith's "The Dutchman." Terry Cashman and Tommy West included the tune on their **"Lifesong"** [1974], and the same year Tom Rush included Smith's "Hobo's Mandolin" on **"Ladies Love Outlaws."** Michael's "Spoon River" appeared on the Bob Gibson and Hamilton Camp reunion **"Homemade Music"** [1978].

**"Zen,"** a duo recording, was made at the Raven Gallery in Ann Arbor, Michigan during the mid-seventies. With Goodman covering further Michael Smith songs, the couple relocated to Chicago toward the end of the decade, and Smith and Goodman went on to collaborate as writers. In the early eighties Smith's songwriting had taken a right turn toward pop, and forming The Jet Band [inspired by McCartney's 1974 song ?], the septet cut one album, **"Empty Handed."**

For a few years during the eighties Michael had a day job, but continued to play music in his spare time. He played bass for the late Bob Gibson. *"It was a way of dipping my toe in the water. Gibson was a great help to me."* Folk singer Anne Hills, who had also moved from Michigan to Chicago, became an ardent supporter of Smith's and she produced his debut and sophomore solo albums, respectively, **"Michael Smith"** and **"Love Songs."** Flying Fish, now part of Rounder Records, released the albums. During the eighties and nineties, Michael worked on a number of theatre productions, including **"The Women In My Life,"** and the award winning Steppenwolf Theatre Company production of Steinbeck's **"The Grapes of Wrath"** [Michael composed original music and appeared in productions in Chicago, New York, San Diego and London], and the autobiographical **"Michael, Margaret, Pat & Kate."**

In 1994 Michael released two recordings. **"Time,"** produced by Anne Hills, became his third Flying Fish release, while Smith self-released **"Michael, Margaret, Pat & Kate."** Wind River Records, the Folk Era subsidiary, reissued the album five years later, with a marginally different track listing. Written by Michael and Jamie O'Reilly, **"Pasiones,"** made its debut at the Rhino In Winter Theatre Festival in 1997, and an album of the same title, that merged Smith originals with songs composed during the conflict, was self-released soon afterwards. The following year Smith and Hills cut the duo album **"Paradise Lost &**

**Found.**” In Y2K another duo album arrived, this time with James Lee Stanley. Released by the latter’s Beechwood Recordings it was titled **“Two Man Band Two.”** Michael’s fifth solo album **“There”** also appeared that year.

Michael, Barbara and Chicago based folk veterans, Tom Dundee and Mark Dvorak, formed Weavermania a few years ago, and in 2001 the quartet self-released the fifteen song tribute **“Weavermania Live.”** In the late Spring of 2003 Appleseed Recordings issued the *story song* album **“Fourtold”** by Smith, Hills, Steve Gillette and his wife, Cindy Mangsen. Six months later a pair of Michael Smith live recordings appeared, **“Michael Peter Smith – Live At Dark Thirty”** and **“Such Things Are Finely Done,”** featuring songs new and old. In late 2003 a CD recording was released of the score that Michael created for a 2001 stage production by the Judith Svalander Concert Dancers of **“The Gift Of The Magi,”** based on O. Henry’s story.

Recorded at Glenn Gould Studio in Toronto on February 11<sup>th</sup> 2005, **“Just Plain Folk”** featured live performances of a selection of traditional and contemporary folk songs by vocalists, John McDermott [The Irish Tenors], Cindy Church, Jason Fowler, Paul Langlois and Michael Smith. Smith closed the recording with five of his own compositions. Credited to Michael Peter Smith **“Anthology One”** was a ten-song collection of Smith compositions new and old. As with **“Just Plain Folk,”** it was released by EMI Canada. Recorded at The Maverick Saloon in Santa Ynez, California on 12<sup>th</sup> March 2008, Smith’s **“Love Letter On A Fish”** sub-titled **“Tales From The Tavern Too”** was his second release in the ‘live concert’ series of recordings released by the Tales From The Tavern organisation. The collection featured a handful of never previously released Smith compositions.

#### Discography :

with Juarez : **“Juarez”** [1970] :

with The Jet Band : **“Empty Handed”** [1981] ;

with Barbara Barrow : **“Mickey And Babs Get Hot”** [1974] ; **“Zen”** [1977] :

with Jamie O'Reilly : **“Pasiones”** [1997] ; **“The Gift Of The Magi”** [2003] :

with Anne Hills : **“Paradise Lost And Found”** [1999] :

with James Lee Stanley : **“Two Man Band Two”** [2000] :

with Weavermania ! : **“Live”** [2001] :

with Fourtold : **“Fourtold”** [2003] :

with John McDermott & Others : **“Just Plain Folk”** [2005] :

Solo : **“Michael Smith”** [1986] ; **“Love Stories”** [1987] ; **“Michael Smith/ Love Stories”** two albums on one CD reissue [1991] ; **“Time”** [1994] ; **“Michael, Margaret, Pat & Kate”** self release [1994] ;

**“Michael, Margaret, Pat & Kate”** reissue by Wind River with extra tracks [1999] ; **“There”** [2000] ;

**“Michael Peter Smith – Live At Dark Thirty”** [2003] ; **“Such Things Are Finely Done”** [2003] ;

**“Anthology One”** [2005] ; **“Live At The Kerrville Folk Festival 2007”** limited release by the festival [2007] ;

**“Live At The Kerrville Folk Festival 2008”** limited release by the festival [2008] ; **“Love Letter On A Fish”** [2008] :

#### Arthur Wood

Kerrville Kronikles 11/03, 11/04, 04/06, 07/06 & 12/08

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