

## Hearts & Flowers – Tip of an Iceberg

Hearts And Flowers, a trio, recorded two folk-rock/country-rock influenced albums for Capitol Records in the latter half of the nineteen-sixties. The first **“Now Is The Time For (Hearts And Flowers)”** [1967] was followed by **“Of Horses, Kids, And Forgotten Women”** [1968], and both albums were produced by the late Nik Venet. During that period Venet worked in the studio with the late Fred Neil [#] and Linda Ronstadt [#]. The Hearts And Flowers albums were first reissued, separately, in the eighties by the new defunct British label, Bam Caruso. They reappeared in the UK on a single CD issued by Demon Records subsidiary Edsel during 1995, and are currently available once more in that format, in the UK, via the Rev-ola label. In the States, the recently released Collector's Choice 2CD version **“The Complete Hearts And Flowers”** has virtually *torpedoed* the foregoing reissue, since apart from the 22 cuts on the original albums, the CC release includes thirteen previously unavailable tracks on Disc 2. Those are the simple unadorned vinyl/CD facts concerning the trio, Hearts And Flowers.

Bernie Leadon apart, Hearts And Flowers alumni Larry Murray, Rick Cunha and David Dawson can hardly claim to be well-known household names and their contribution to the *musical melting pot* that was fermenting in California during the late fifties and through the sixties, could be compared to that of, *the tip of an iceberg*. Their individual histories prior to, during and post Hearts And Flowers are none the less interesting, in terms of [repeatedly] replicating that *melting pot*. First we'll take a look at those personal histories, and then the recordings they made as Hearts And Flowers.

Larry Murray was born in Waycross, Georgia, a location eulogised in the late Mickey Newbury's "San Francisco Mabel Joy." Probably Newbury's most recorded song, the lyric talks of a *“Waycross, Georgia farm boy”* who longs to see more of the world so he hops a freight train to Los Angeles, which is precisely where Murray landed in the late fifties. A guitarist, in 1958, Larry joined future Byrd Chris Hillman [mandolin], Ed Douglas [+ ] [bass], Gary Carr [guitar] and Kenny Wertz [banjo] in the Scottsville Squirrel Barkers. Reputedly paid \$50 each, they cut a ten-track *supermarket counter* album for the Crown label titled **“Bluegrass Favourites”** [CST 346]. One of the group's best paying gigs was at Disneyland, where Tom Campbell [\*\*] booked the entertainment.

When Wertz left the Barkers in 1961, he later joined Country Gazette and the Flying Burrito Brothers, his place was taken by Bernie Leadon. The Barkers parted company in 1962 and Leadon headed east to Florida [%] where his father had taken up a university teaching post. Chris formed the Hillmen with Rex and Vern - the Gosdin Brothers, and Don Parmley, while Murray remained in California. In 1964, Randy Sparks [\$], the brains behind The New Christy Minstrels [est. 1961], decided to capitalise on the, then, current folk boom by forming the Green Grass Group, which initially included Hillman and Murray. A matter of months later, in October 1964, Hillman received a call from Messrs. McGuinn, Crosby & Clark and the rest as they say.....

In 1964, Murray was working at Doug Weston's Troubadour Folk Club in West Hollywood as the *hoot* night host, when he saw Rick Cunha [guitar/vocals] and David Dawson [autoharp/vocals] perform. Cunha and Dawson had been raised in Hawaii where they had worked as a folk duo, while Cunha also headed the band, Ricky and the Facemakers. Looking for richer pickings, the pair headed for California. Murray suggested that they form a trio, and later summed up their musical approach as *“Georgia country-folk meets Hawaiian ukelele folk-rock.”* Following a couple of years touring West Coast clubs, the band scored a recording deal with Capitol Records. With *house* producer Nik Venet, they cut **“Now Is The Time For (Hearts And Flowers),”** which, reputedly, was issued on the same day as **“Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band.”** Touring in support of the album, the recruited a *back line* of Terry Paul and Dan Woody to boost their sound, but when they entered the studios to cut **“Of Horses, Kids, And Forgotten Women,”** Paul and Woody were gone, while Bernie Leadon who had returned to California in 1967 had taken Cunha's place. Future Dillard & Clark bassist, David Jackson, was later recruited for their live shows. The second album fared no better sales wise, and the threesome went their separate ways as 1968 drew to a close.

Dawson dropped out of the music business, reputedly becoming a mechanic. Cunha, the grandson of legendary Hawaiian *haole* composer Sonny Cunha [\*] ["Hula Blues," "Hapa Haole Hula Girl" etc.], went on to work as host at the Troubadour, then toured for a number of years with Mason Williams and also produced many of the guitarist's albums. Eventually Rick began to concentrate on studio work, as a musician/engineer/producer. Along with Jennifer [Warnes], he was a member of backing vocalists, The

Dump Trucks, on John Stewart's "**The Lonesome Picker Rides Again**" [1971] album. In 1974 Rick cut his debut solo disc for the Atlanta, Georgia based General Recording Corporation. Titled "**Songs**," the Nashville recording sessions were produced by Ken Mansfield and eight of the nine tracks were Cunha originals. The only cover song was A. P. Carter's "Wild Side Of Life," while the only co-write "(I'm A) Yo Yo Man" penned with Marty Cooper, was later covered by Brit Iain Matthews. The following year Rick worked on Emmylou Harris' "**Pieces Of The Sky**" and also appeared on her "**Elite Hotel**" [1976] and "**Luxury Liner**" [1977] discs. In 1975 Rick signed a recording deal with CBS and "**Moving Pictures**," another Mansfield production, featuring ten Cunha originals was cut that year. Guest contributors included Murray and Dawson, Jennifer Warnes, and Jessi Colter and the late Waylon Jennings. The album, leased to Sierra Briar Records, was finally released in 1980. Four of the cuts from Rick's sophomore album, including the title track and "Good Ol' Days," were featured in the movie "**Best Friends**" [1975]. Rick went on to work with Linda Ronstadt, Anne Murray, Jennifer Warnes, Buck Owens, Dolly Parton, Waylon Jennings and The Smothers Brothers. A lifelong ukulele enthusiast, in recent years Cunha has contributed to a number of the "**Ukulele Summit**" compilations issued by Island Café Records. In 1999 Warnes cut the vocal for Rick's "Dear Old Honolulu," which is to be featured on an as yet unreleased tribute album to his grandfather, Sonny. Sonny was recently elected to the Hawaiian Music Hall of Fame. Rick played guitar on a couple of cuts, and assisted in engineering Jennifer's latest album "**The Well**" [2001]. Last year Cunha appeared as one of The String Wizards on the John McEuen/Jimmy Ibbotson concert DVD release "**Nitty Gritty Surround**."

In 1969 the folk oriented Verve Forecast label issued Larry Murray's only solo recording, "**Sweet Country Suite**." Co-produced with Ken Mansfield, the session musicians included the band Swampwater, steel guitar whiz Buddy Emmons, Dirt Band alumni Fadden and McEuen, John David Souther [^] and Gib Gilbeau [Nashville West, Burrito's]. In 1967/68 Nik Venet recorded an album by Mary McCaslin, but only a single teaming Lennon/McCartney's "Rain" with Mike Nesmith's "This All Happened Once Before" surfaced on Capitol Records [-]. Murray produced, for the Barnaby label, Mary McCaslin's first album release "**Goodnight Everybody**" [1969], a collection that featured Murray's "Jamie" along with compositions by Hoyt Axton and Michael Murphey. Twelve years later Larry reappeared as producer of the late Jim Ringer's final studio album "**Endangered Species**." McCaslin had met and married Ringer in the early seventies, and they toured/performed as a duo for two decades. Jim's album included the Ringer/Murray co-writes "Linda's Out There On Her Own," while the session players amounted to numerous past/present members of The Dillards, Hot Band and Burrito's, as well as Herb Pedersen and Swampwater's John Beland. Circa 1971 Swampwater's second self-titled album, released by RCA Records and featuring liner notes by Arlo Guthrie, had been produced by Murray. A couple years later Larry produced two albums for Jackson Browne's brother, Severin, that were released by Motown Records.

During the early seventies Murray worked with Kris Kristofferson and Jessi Colter. Diversifying, he turned to television scriptwriting and worked with The Smothers Brothers and Johnny Cash. In 1973 Murray wrote the screenplay for "**The Gospel Road**" which was directed by Robert Elfstrom. In the movie Elfstrom played Chris, while June Carter Cash took the part of Mary Magdalene. In 1989 the Italian Appaloosa label issued a CD titled, "**Wheels – Tribute to Gram Parsons and Clarence White**," which featured contributions by the Burrito's, Swampwater and Bobby Bare. Recorded at the Cannary in Nashville on October 1<sup>st</sup> 1988, at the annual Gram Parson Memorial Concert, Murray performs his compositions "Six White Horses" and "Bugler." Prior to his tragic death, the latter song was the final number that White recorded as a Byrd, and on "**Wheels**" Murray plays Clarence's *famous* Guild guitar.

Post Hearts And Flowers, Leadon and Jackson joined Don Beck, ex-Bryds Micheal Clarke and Gene Clark and Doug Dillard of The Dillards in Dillard & Clark. He stayed for the first album "**The Fantastic Expedition**" [1968] and part of "**Through The Morning, Through The Night**," reportedly departing when *recruit*, Donna Washburn, took over harmony vocals. When Jeff Hanna reformed the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band in late 1969, Leadon took his place in Ronstadt's Corvettes. Swampwater would subsequently fulfil that role for the songbird. In a matter of months Leadon had moved on, taking Chris Ethridge's place in the Flying Burrito Brothers. He arrived in time to appear on their sophomore set "**Burrito Deluxe**." In July 1971 Bernie returned to Linda's road band, which now included Glenn Frey and Don Henley. Recruiting ex-Poco bassist, Randy Meisner, and with a recording contract commitment from David Geffen, the quartet retreated to Colorado to *get it together* and become The Eagles. For all that the Eagles music epitomised California's, or at least Los Angeles, *life in the fast lane*, Leadon is the only *original* Eagle who grew up in the state. Born in Minnesota, his family moved to the west coast when

Bernie was a youngster. By 1975 with four Eagles albums under his belt, tired of touring, Leadon's spot was taken by Joe Walsh. Partnering Michael Georgiades, in 1977 the pair made one, self-titled band album for Asylum. By the early eighties Bernie was working with Chris Hillman once more and appeared, *alongside numerous usual suspects*, on "**Morning Sky**" and "**Desert Rose.**" Hillman, Leadon, pedal steel player Al Perkins [**<**], David Mansfield [**>**] and Jerry Scheff went on to record a pair of "Christian bluegrass" albums "**Down Home Praise**" [1983] and "**Ever Call Ready**" [1984]. Three years later Leadon took the departing John McEuen's place in the Dirt Band and played on "**Workin' Band**" [1988], although he's not pictured with band. Leadon was listed as a *guest picker* on "**Will The Circle Be Unbroken, Vol. Two**" [1989]. During the nineties, Leadon was a member of Run/C&W, a *spoof* country band that covered rap and soul songs.

In the nether world of artists who never quite made it to the Top 10, there must be legions of partly completed, or completed and abandoned, recording projects some of which are undoubtedly *diamonds*. Occasionally these diamonds surface, and I feel that there is much merit in stating that, if not for the pioneering work of Bam Caruso, Hearts And Flowers may have been condemned to a footnote in musical history.

Which brings us to the eleven songs on "**Now Is The Time For (Hearts And Flowers).**" The album opened with the semi-instrumental title cut, which featured toward the end a short, semi-spoken Larry Murray lyric, an evocation for mankind to live in peace. "Save Some Time," which followed, is the first of nine cover songs, and one of two numbers penned by long time Cunha collaborator Marty Cooper. The other cover songs included Tim Hardin's "Reason to Believe," Hoyt Axton's "10,000 Sunsets" and Goffin/King's "Road To Nowhere." Sixties Brit folk was represented by Donovan's "Try For The Sun," while "Please" penned by band members Mark Feedman/Soloman Fedthouse was originally an album cut by, and 1967 single for, Kaleidoscope, an exotic/psychedelic sounding aggregation that featured Chris Darrow [later in the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band], and *future* Jackson Browne associate David Lindley. The most pop oriented Hearts And Flowers cut, "Rock And Roll Gypsies," was a 1965 single for the Oklahoma bred duo, Gypsy Trips, brothers Roger and Terrye Tillison. Roger Tillison composed the song. When teamed with J.J. Cale as Leather-Coated Minds, the Tillison's cut an album for the Viva label. Apart from the opening track, Murray and Cunha contributed one composition each to Hearts And Flowers debut set, respectively "Rain, Rain" and Rick's sixties sounding "1-2-3 Rhyme In Carnivour Thyme." The aforementioned "Road To Nowhere" featured a female vocalist – possibly Ronstadt – but the vinyl liner and subsequent reissues have contained literally no session or musician details.

An extended version of Murray's title cut from the trio's debut opened "**Of Horses, Kids, And Forgotten Women.**" Larry contributed two other originals "Second-Hand Sundown Queen" – the tale of a *lady of the night* and the lyrically strange "Ode To A Tin Angel," and with Dawson/Leadon collaborated on the arrangement of four traditional songs - "When I Was A Cowboy," "Legend Of Ol' Tenbrookes" the tale of a horse race between Molly and Tenbrookes, wherein the latter wins but dies on the finish line, and "Two Little Boys." The following year, the latter song became a # 1 hit in the UK for painter/entertainer Rolf Harris. The old-time sounding "She Sang Hymns Out Of Tune," prominently featured Dawson's autoharp and was penned by Jesse Lee Kincaid. Kincaid was a member of Rising Sons, a band whose line-up included Ry Cooder and Taj Mahal, plus drummers, Ed Cassidy [Spirit] and Chris Hillman's cousin, the late Kevin Kelley [Byrds]. The ten track, second album closed with a segue mix of the [trio's arrangement of the] traditional "Extra Extra" and "Rock And Roll Gypsies" taken from the trio's first album.

The thirteen-track collection of previously unreleased Hearts And Flowers recordings very much follows their trademark acoustic banjo/guitar/autoharp sound, while their three-way vocal harmonies are equally rich. There's a more laid back reinterpretation of "Extra Extra," and considering Venet's presence it's hardly surprising that Fred Neil's "Everybody's Talkin'" and "Other Side Of This Life" were given an airing. The latter cut featured Stone Poney, Kenny Edwards on sitar. The composer of "Six White Horses" is noted as *unknown* on the liner, whereas the aforementioned "**Wheels**" disc credits Murray ? Two other songs are credited to *unknown*. Gordon Lightfoot's "Walls" and Phil Ochs "Flower Lady" amounted to the contributions from contemporary song poets, while the gentle "When I'm With You" dates from 1936 and was covered during that era by Shirley Temple. The North Carolina born composer of the love song "Gypsy Blue," the late Harold Floyd "Tina" Brooks, was a tenor saxophonist in jazz bands for most of his career. The brassy good-time sounding "California Sunshine Girl" was a 1966 single for The Shackelfords, a trio that featured Marty Cooper, Lee Hazlewood and Naomi Shackelford [Lee's wife].

As I said at the outset of this feature, this is the tale of a *melting pot* and the *tip of an extraordinarily incestuous iceberg*. Case proven?

**Note.**

[#] – The recordings in question being Neil's "**Sessions**" and Linda Ronstadt/The Stone Poneys "**Evergreen, Vol. 2**" and "**Vol. 3**."

[+] – Douglas, a former police officer, was an apprentice at San Diego guitar shop, The Blue Guitar. Established in 1961 [and still in business], the Barkers would hang out there. Ala McCabe's, Mason Williams and Hoyt Axton are among the performers who played shows there.

[\*\*] – A musician and acquaintance of Steve Gillette's, the pair co-wrote the *traditional sounding*, folk classic "Darcy Farrow."

[\$] – Christy Minstrel alumni include - Byrd Gene Clark, Barry McGuire [scored # 1 single with P.F. Sloan's "Eve of Destruction"], Bob Buchanan [International Submarine Band and co-writer with Gram Parsons of "Hickory Wind"], Kenny Rogers, Larry Ramos [Association], Mike Settle [First Edition], Karen Black [movie actress] and Susan Pack [Mickey Newbury's wife]. And doubtless many more.

[%] – In Florida circa the early sixties, Leadon met and played music with Don Felder, the *future* Eagle.

[\*] – The first Hawaiian to graduate from Harvard, circa 1920's.

[^] – Souther and future Eagle, Glenn Frey, were in a duo called Longbranch Pennywhistle, who cut one album for Amos Records. Souther was later in a band with Byrd Hillman and Buffalo Springfield's Richie Furay. Al Perkins was one of the support players.

[~] – An eighteen track Mary McCaslin CD titled "**Rain – The Lost Album**" was issued by the German, Bear Family label in 1999. For readers interested in female performers such as Nanci Griffith and Iris DeMent, you would do well to investigate McCaslin's back catalogue.

[<] – A Texan, Perkins along with Don Henley, Mike and Richard Bowden, and future Nashville hit producer Jim Ed Norman, arrived on the West Coast circa 1969 as the band, Shiloh. Shiloh's only album, produced by Texas Kenny Rogers, was an Amos Records release.

[>] – A wonderfully diverse musician [ie. a personal hero] whose was once a member of The Alpha Band with Henry *T-Bone* Burnett.

Arthur Wood.

Kerrville Kronikles 02/03

[2500 words]