

Former 'Yahoo' seeks solo career, latest song receives national airplay

By PAUL DORSEY
Herald staff writer

Hillsburgh resident John Ellis isn't in town much these days. The former member of the somewhat infamous Orton Yahoos and once a driving force behind the Hillsburgh Bluegrass Jamboree is a living out of a recording studio in Oakville that has already produced his first solo effort, a single release entitled You Are that is being aired on some 50 radio stations across Canada.

Heard locally on Oakville's CHWO, Mississauga's CJMR and Guelph's CJOY, You Are is one of a growing repertoire of tunes written, performed and produced by John and his current associates, Peter Arthur and Jim Mancel, that are attracting international interest.



John Ellis (right) formerly of the Hillsburgh-based bluegrass group The Orton Yahoos pauses during the Oakville recording sessions for his forthcoming album with his production associate and songwriting partner

Peter Arthur. The two musicians are attracting widespread interest for their talents from such notable stars as Anne Murray.

(Herald photo)

BUSINESS ASPECTS

A discussion with John and Peter about the business aspects of their songwriting prompts some sincere name-dropping that starts to sound like a Who's Who of Canadian pop music, with occasional forays to New York and Los Angeles.

Oakville's Sound Path Records studio off Trafalgar Road is a long way from the makeshift tape-deck system in John's Hillsburgh home on which the original acoustic jam sessions staged by his friends Wayne Tucker of Orton and Nino Martina, formerly of Georgetown, were recorded.

John, Nino and Wayne were nevertheless impressed enough by the final mix of the music they created in John's basement that they formed the Orton Yahoos, played together in bars and halls from Acton to Wawa, became hometown favorites at the annual Hillsburgh Bluegrass Jamboree and ultimately recorded an album on their own Howdy Records label entitled The Great Canadian Tragedy.

By the time John started hawking the album from record stores to radio station to record store, however, the Yahoos had gone their separate ways. Wayne is presently something of a restaurateur in Florida, while Nino was last

reported playing in a local band in New York state.

Meanwhile back at the ranch, John was saved from possible discouragement by the interest being shown in his fine voice. He now considers The Great Canadian Tragedy a "marker" - an achievement he hopes will become the foundation to a musical career that is indeed showing every sign of taking off.

SOUND PATH
John's alliance with Peter Arthur, a veteran musician in his own right, began at Sound Path when the Yahoos showed up there to record their album. He and Peter, who is a principle in the company and engineer on the records and tapes produced there, started working on songs of their own and the results surprised and delighted everyone, including themselves.

You Are, written by Peter and John Mancel, and its flip side, Don't It Just Wanna Make You Cry, written by John and Peter, are blatantly melody and instrumentation. The effect is quite deliberate, a likely result of John's impatience

with trying to find a market for the less commercialized music he performed with the Yahoos.

But while John maintains an overt fondness for bluegrass music, he is not at all insincere in his admiration for the kinds of music being produced by such established stars as Anne Murray and, recently, by Gord Lightfoot.

Providing the music to back up John's vocal on the flip side, in fact, are Toronto session players Tom Szczesniak, Brian Leonard and Brian Russell who are best known for their ongoing work with both Murray and Lightfoot.

Anne Murray is among the established artists interested in performing and recording some of the songs written by the new Ellis-Arthur team. One of their tunes, Two Feet Off The Ground, will be turning up on the new album by Myles Cohen, formerly of the successful folk-rock duo Myles and Lenny.

QUITE CAUTIONS
John and Peter are quite cautious, however, about releasing publishing rights to

their music. Aware of their commitment to Sound Path Records and guarded about their integrity as songwriters, they wish instead to release their own music on John's own album, tentatively slated for summer pressing. After that, they are confident, offers can be considered in their true perspective.

Are You is cutting a swath for John through the Canadian mainstream pop airwaves, he is increasingly more willing to wade beyond the strict boundaries of MOR, or "easy listening music," with his subsequent single releases. Already being finalized for release this spring are two more tunes, Captain Courageous and Moonshine Mountain, both of which are more country-rock oriented and promise to extend John's following as a recording artist to younger listeners.

Captain Courageous is highly reminiscent of recent music by American folk-rocker Jimmy Buffett, and in fact borrows from that singer's love for the leisure of sailing, the Caribbean Sea and Jamaican rum to evoke a most relaxing

mood for listeners in any climate or situation.

The same is largely true of Moonshine Mountain, named after a location that is something of a local landmark in the Hillsburgh area, according to John. Both tunes have an indisputably relaxing effect that is perhaps partially the result of the atmosphere itself at Sound Path Records.

TWO YEARS

Two years after its establishment, Sound Path is coming into its own. Canadian recording artists from every branch of the music industry are being referred by colleagues and contacts to Sound Path in particular and the smaller studios outside Toronto in general. Cherisse Lawrence, star of the CTV series Circus, recorded her recent album there, while on another occasion, rock singer Ray Materick dropped by with a contingent of industry publicists to record a live promotional tape.

Slowly but surely the word is spreading, both about the attractions of Sound Path, with its consciously tranquil surroundings, and about John Ellis and Peter Arthur. With a thoroughly convincing single release underlining their right to enter the often exalted world of the more established singers and songwriters, the new Lennon and McCartney of Canadian music are at work planning their assault on a market that is all too rarely receptive to new talent.

As the tunes are written, they are recorded as demo tapes, then reworked to become single releases and distributed among the less restrictive radio stations. There, their appearance on regular playlists and in such trade publications as RPM magazine catches the eye of not only the bigger radio stations but the promoters who hold the keys to success.

Most of the steps are covered. With an album on the way, John Ellis and Peter Arthur are simply waiting in the wings for their spotlight to shine.

Husband belonged to air force Captain Smith travelled Canada

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competent!" male officers, Lieut. Peter Puchyr, Lieut. Carl Groskorth, Officer Cadet Bill Phipps and Officer Cadet Don Cousins and civilian instructors Harry Clarke and Don Lancaster. Tom Massena teaches first aid and Colin Vernon is range safety officer while Les Mallabon and Peter Snog work with the band.

"It's like having my own harem," she chuckles. "I've never run into any problems in the line of command. I've stepped on a few toes, but that's to be expected and if it's done properly there are no grudges."

Capt. Smith has no military background. She grew up in London, Ontario and jokes about how she made \$400 a week as a model at the age of 18.

"That's more than my dad

was making and yet I griped about paying \$5 a week board," she says. "I never seemed to have it. I always spent it on clothes."

"It was a very glamorous life style," she adds, "and rather phoney."

She modelled for an agency in London and says the models were all protected.

"We'd go and do the big auto shows in Detroit. Then when the shows were over and parties began we just packed up and left. We were paid for a job and when it was over we went home."

DID TELEVISION

She also did television commercials and modelled in fashion shows three afternoons a week for Simpsons.

She was 21 when she married

Gerry Smith, an R.C.A.F. pilot stationed at Winnipeg. Their eldest son, Randy, was born there.

The next posting was to Summerside, P.E.I. and Mrs. Smith went back to modelling. She used to do the back page of the local newspaper every week for Eaton's, the equivalent of Halton's only on a local scale, and also did some commercials for CNR. When they wanted to fly her to Halifax to do more commercials her husband put his foot down and reminded her she had a young son who needed her at home more than she would be if she went to Halifax.

"We used to go out to the beach at Cavendish and I'd be exhausted by the time we got back," she says. "We'd start

at nine a.m. and tramp through the water and all day. I'd be sunburned and blistered and worn out by the time we got back at six after I'd had to change into about 15 outfits."

"It was tough but good," she says. "It was real discipline and you didn't complain because you had been selected from a lot of people to do this particular job so you just hustled your little fanny out there and did it."

LEFT FORCE

Her husband left the air force while he was at Camp Greenwood, Nova Scotia, and they moved to Toronto where he became an Air Canada pilot. Capt. Smith began modelling for an agency in Toronto but left it because she was less than impressed with the way the jobs were run.

Their second son, Cal, arrived while they were in Toronto, and Angela was born after the family moved to Georgetown.

Capt. Smith was a director on the Georgetown YM-YWCA when it was just beginning and remembers running a slim and charm course with Mary Simpson in order to raise funds for the Y. She also set up and operated the Y's ski club for seven or eight years back when no one in Georgetown was skiing. They taught the kids on the North Halton Golf and Country Club at first, then moved to the hills behind the high school.

Capt. Smith still models for charitable organizations around town and says she'll keep at it "until nobody wants me any more."

She also sees herself remain-

ing with air cadets even after her term as commanding officer is ended.

THREE TERMS

Commanding officer's have three year terms by tradition, she says, but there is nothing to say she must leave the squadron. She could become a supply officer or something, or even transfer to another branch of the service.

When asked how she found being in the military camped with modelling she just laughed. "Well, they certainly took the mince out of my walk by the time I learned to march. When you get boots on and get out there in a parade square you're going to march and there's no time for a model's step."

Capt. Smith's husband has been "very supportive" of all her cadet work.

"He never complains about the hours I spent on their projects. In fact, odd times when something happened and I can't be there for a sports program I had promised them he'll go in my place. He always comes home saying they're a super bunch of kids."

"Several people have suggested that Gerry might enjoy coming over as one of our civilian instructors and we have talked about it, but we don't think it's good for a marriage to have both partners so deeply tied up in an activity. I've seen it happen and they just talk, eat, think cadets. We wouldn't want that."

Mrs. Smith is a sports minded woman and loves skiing, tennis, sailing as well as travelling and going ceramics.

Recent CVCA meeting welcomes new members

"We think the Credit River is the most beautiful in southern Ontario and we work very hard to keep it that way," chairman A. Grant Clarkson said in welcoming the members and guests to the inaugural meeting of the Credit Valley Conservation Authority. Mr. Clarkson has been reappointed as chairman for 1979.

Five new members were appointed to the authority by the member municipalities in the watershed. These include Pete Pomeroy of Halton Hills, Regional Municipality of Halton and Clark Glassford of Caledon, and Ken Dear, Steve Mahoney and Peter Novar of Mississauga, Regional Municipality of Peel.

man, Ken Whillans, Brampton was re-elected chairman of the Water Management advisory board; Harold Kennedy, Mississauga is the vice-chairman.

The authority chairman and vice chairman plus the five advisory board chairmen will constitute the executive committee for 1979. In the absence of their respective chairmen, each vice-chairman has full voting rights on the executive committee.

Other members appointed to Advisory Boards are: Historical Records Advisory Board -

Laurie Mannell, Oakville and Roy McMillan, Honourary Life Member, Information and Education Advisory Board - Steve Mahoney and Peter Novar, Mississauga, Parks and Recreation Advisory Board - Murray Bryan, East Garafraxa Township, and Roy McMillan, Reformation, Land Use and Wildlife Advisory Board - Robert Shirley, Mono Township and Les Dudy, Halton Hills, Water Management Advisory Board - Pete Pomeroy, Halton Hills and Ken Dear, Mississauga.

Wetlands purchase

The Credit Valley Conservation Authority recently finalized the acquisition of 115.671 acres of land on the Credit River north of Highway 24 for \$192,441.40.

This land, known as the CAHO property on the unopened road allowance on the Second Line West in Caledon, was purchased with the assistance of the Richard Ivey Foundation through the Nature Conservancy of Canada. This group contributed \$47,700.00 toward the purchase price.

The area contains marsh and forested uplands along the river. These headwater recharge areas and forests assist in keeping water quality high and erosion to a minimum in the upper reaches of the Credit River.

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