

Tom Rush: Uphill since senility ward singing

By DAVID RENSIN

James Taylor's nasal drawl crackled insistently across the telephone line from his Martha's Vineyard retreat. "I first heard Tom Rush about 10 years ago and instantly became a big fan." He paused and cocked an ear in the direction of baby Sarah, just starting to cry in the background. "I copied and learned a lot of his arrangements, so I guess it's fair to say that Tom was not only one of my early heroes, but also one of my main influences."

Taylor met Rush in the late '60s, when he went to Elektra Records in Los Angeles to sell himself as an artist to Rush's then producer, Paul Rothchild. Rothchild "wasn't having any," but did tell Taylor that Rush had expressed "interest" in some of his material. Taylor met Rush and auditioned a few numbers, and two, "Sunshine Sunshine" and "Something in the Way She Moves," ended up on Rush's now classic Circle Game LP with songs from two other as-yet-undiscovered talents, Jackson Browne and Joni Mitchell.

Taylor and Browne are now returning the favor, after a fashion, by lending vocal assistance on Rush's first album in more than two years, Ladies Love Outlaws, for Columbia, his present label.

Besides the pair (Browne is uncredited, reportedly due to Elektra-Asylum head David Geffen's reluctance to allow Columbia to capitalize on the names of his acts, Carly Simon and Timothy B. Schmidt of Poco appear, as do Don Henley and Randy Meisner of the Eagles (also unlisted). Contributing musicians include Jeff "Skunk" Baxter, formerly of Steely Dan, and Elliott Randall, ex-SeaTrain and Randall's Island guitarist who now divides his time between studio sessions and Sha Na Na road trips.

Why all the sudden support?

Taylor: "Tom's a fantastic person and a good artist."

Browne: "Tom's a fine performer who knows good material. He was a real friend to me in the beginning somebody who had succeeded at what I always wanted to do. I looked up to him. He was a stranger, but he gave me a chance."

With Taylor and Browne chipping in, Ladies Love Outlaws becomes the setting for a partial reunion of the Circle Game songwriters. Only Joni Mitchell is missing.

"It never occurred to me to ask Joni," Rush explained apologetically, "because I never viewed the album as having that purpose. I got people because they were good at what they did, and sure enough, they were. James does the 'whoas' on 'Jenny Lynn' because he has a knack for doing 'whoas.' The rough edge on Jackson's voice kept the harmonies from sounding too super clean — exactly the effect I wanted."

Mark Spector, Rush's 25-year-old Columbia staff producer out on his first studio venture, seemed a bit more aware of what Rush conceded was a "good gossip tag." He sat explaining in a New York coffee shop.

"I wanted to reintroduce Tom after such a long absence. I thought I could do it effectively since five of the Top 10 records in the past



Tom Rush: A much loved 'outlaw'

Rolling Stone

four months were by artists like Lightfoot and Muldaur. I figured, why not Rush?"

The next day, sitting in a home-built studio above the garage of his comfortable New Hampshire farmhouse, Rush seemed to be saying, "Why not Spector?" Contractual hassles with Columbia and the search for a producer (Norbert Putnam and Jim Mason were among those considered) had forced Rush into a virtual recording standstill since the 1972 release of the self-produced and admittedly "somewhat scattered" Merrimack County, finally, Rush decided to go into the studio with Spector.

The tunes on Ladies Love Outlaws are by a new generation of songwriters: Lee Clayton (whose title track was also done by Waylon Jennings), Wayne Berry, Guy Clark, Richard Dean, Bruce Cockburn, Michael Smith and one venerable figure, Rush himself.

Rush contributes only an occasional song to his albums (one original and one adaptation this time) and blames a "lack of discipline" for the rarity of original material. "No Regrets," the original on the new album, was a year in the making. "That," grinned Rush, "is pretty fast for me. But I've also been talked out of doing songs because one in 20 people didn't like it. Artists, due to their fragile egos, are very open to believing negative criticism."

In an apparent effort to reassert himself, Rush and Orphan (the London Records act-backup band accompanying him on his tour), do "Glory Road" as part of their set — a Rush composition

Spector convinced him had no place on Ladies Love Outlaws.

With the success of Taylor, Mitchell and Browne, Rush has gained a reputation as a father figure and freelance A&R man of sorts. A corner of his studio displays boxes filled with tapes from singer-songwriters who hope one of their tunes will appear on a Rush album. He doesn't have time to listen anymore, but insists they do get heard.

"I listened to the first 5,000 and never found a tune I could use. After a while, it just got out of proportion."

Still, he disavows any particular foresight in behalf of Taylor, Browne or Mitchell. "If I hadn't done it, those people would have gotten recorded anyway. They were too good to go unnoticed. The credit's flattering but not justifiable. I was just fortunate enough to find some good songs to do. I just look for numbers that get me off. I'm aware that if I do a song, it might get more attention,

but what should I do — stop singing? The world needs interpreters. If everyone did only their own stuff, then everyone would get done only once. But all those tapes, it's just the same old question of how do you get a start in show business?"

Later, during a two-hour drive from home to a studio in Manfred, Mass., where rehearsals for the four-month swing across the country to promote Ladies Love Outlaws and, indirectly, Orphan's More Orphan Than Not are under way, Rush insisted he got his start playing for cows in a field his parents rented to neighboring farmers.

"If you stand in a corner of the pasture making noises, the cows will invariably wander over to look at you," he shouted into a microphone suspended from the rear-view mirror of his van to combat engine whine. "The only way to keep their attention was to get progressively wilder — but not enough to make them

stampede — and feed them some grass between songs. If you did it right, you could hold them for about 10 minutes. It was my first experience relating to an audience. You had to be crazy enough to be interesting, but not so crazy as to be dangerous. It's proven to be an invaluable lesson because it's really the same for normal audiences — except I don't have to feed them grass.

"My next big gig was the Concord State (mental) Hospital, where my mother did volunteer work. One of the things she volunteered was me, and I formed a band composed of inmates from the criminal wing. The big show was the annual institution mixer."

Rush finally emerged from the "dead period" of 1962-63 as a viable folk act in Boston and Cambridge. He attended Harvard, played one or two nights a week and developed a following. Rush made one record for a small label before signing with friend Paul Rothchild, who had become an A & R man for Prestige Records. After cutting two records there, he followed Rothchild to Elektra and did four more albums: Tom Rush, Take a Little Walk With Me, Circle Game and Classic Rush (a greatest-hits collection).

"When I got out of college, my B.A. in English Lit. hadn't prepared me for much of anything, and it was just pure luck that the clubs were there and flourishing when I needed them. I got into this whole thing by accident."

As his reputation expanded, so did his travels. And one day, while working at the Chessmate in Detroit, he met a singer who did occasional guest sets, Joni Mitchell. Rush was "knocked out by her music" and tried to get Judy Collins to record her songs.

"Judy didn't care for them, when I played some at a party in Cambridge. But then she met Joni and heard her do them. The rest is history."

In 1969, Rush teamed with

Trevor Veitch, who was to be his backup guitarist, co-writer and staple of various bands for four years. Veitch left amicably in 1973 and is now part of a duo with former Blues Project and SeaTrain member Andy Kulberg. Rush had been playing alone, until recently joining forces with Orphan. Their tour, thus far, has been rather successful; a good sign for Columbia, which, after Tom Rush, Wrong End of the Rainbow and Merrimack County, is hoping for a sales increase

over the usual 100,000 units that Rush's albums sell.

As one of music's classic interpretive voices, Rush has lost none of his prowess and none of his charm, and, with a little help from his friends, seems to be on the upswing once again. "I never did have a plan and still don't," he concluded, parking the van on a nondescript street in Manfred. "I started singing in a terminal senility ward and it's been pretty much uphill since then. All in all, I would say it's been fairly stable."



GIVE THE GIFT FOR ALL SEASONS

This Christmas, give a year's worth of shopping values, up-to-the-minute news and reading enjoyment. Give a gift subscription to The Sun-Telegram — it's one that will be remembered.

The Sun-Telegram

To subscribe call by area: San Bernardino 889-9666; Redlands 793-2174 or 825-5075; Victorville 245-8437; Barstow 256-6881.

DINING, DANCING ENTERTAINMENT AT OUR NEW YEAR'S EVE PARTY!

ENJOY TABLE SERVICE AND OUR N.Y. CUT STEAK INCLUDES SALAD, POTATOES, SOUP CREAM AND CHIVES, HOT ROLLS & BUTTER. **\$12.50 PER PERSON**

PLUS A BOTTLE OF CHAMPAGNE FOR EACH PERSON AND DOOR PRIZES, FAVORS, HATS, ETC.

Dancing from 9 p.m. to 2 a.m.
DANCING TO "THE OTHER SIDE OF TIME"

GEORGE'S PLANTATION AND MINT JULEP ROOM
1470 EAST HIGHLAND 882-1722

MAKE CHRISTMAS RESERVATIONS FOR BREAKFAST & DINNER AT THE Westowner OF YUCAIPA It's unique

CHRISTMAS BREAKFAST 8 A.M. TO 1 P.M.
CHRISTMAS DINNER NOON TO 10 P.M.

"ACE" NICK KA-MAL'A
At the Singing Piano Bar Wed. thru Sat. OUR FABULOUS CHEF. Psychic Readings Tues. Evening

We Like Your Children.
OPEN EVERY DAY 10:00 A.M. - 2:00 A.M.
For Reservations 797-9938

14th St. off Corner of Yucaipa Blvd. your hosts Eileen & Bill Roberts
Luncheon - Dinner - Cocktails - Sunday Champagne Breakfast

GEORGE'S LUNCH MENU
For your dining pleasure, check our specials for each day.

LUNCH \$1.65 ALSO SPECIAL CHILD'S PLATE

MONDAY LUNCH Chicken Pot Pie with Flaky Biscuits, Meat Loaf the way mother used to make it and two additional taste tempting entrees.

TUESDAY LUNCH Mild but tasty Lasagna, Beef Stew, Hamburger Steaks and Fish Sticks.

WEDNESDAY LUNCH Chicken Chow Mein, Stuffed Bell Peppers, Veal Cutlets, and Burritos.

THURSDAY LUNCH Liver and Onions, Beef Minuettes, Fried Fish, Scalloped Potatoes and Ham.

FRIDAY LUNCH Deep Fried Fish, Spaghetti and Meat Balls, Country Chicken and Cabbage Rolls.

SATURDAY LUNCH Enchiladas served as you like them. Beef Pot Pie with Biscuits, Short Ribs of Beef, and one additional entree.

SUNDAY DINNER ALL DAY - MENU SUBJECT TO CHANGE

GEORGE'S SMORGASBORD
5th & G St. • SAN BERNARDINO PH. 885-7779

MAGIC CHEF GAS RANGE \$179⁸⁸

MAGIC CHEF GAS RANGE

Big 24" wide oven, can't spill oven rack, lift-up removable top, removable oven door, porcelainized steel grates, uni-burner, smokeless broiler, no-spillover edge, low-heat oven control.

\$179⁸⁸

MODEL No. RA313-1

HARLOW'S

AS A RULE YOU PAY LESS
10267 TIPPECANOE
LOMA LINDA
PH. 796-0264 or 889-0047
WE RENT Refrigerators - Ranges - Washers

MEMBER OF 50 UNITED STORES INC. SINCE 1952

AS A RULE YOU PAY LESS
10267 TIPPECANOE
LOMA LINDA
PH. 796-0264 or 889-0047
WE RENT Refrigerators - Ranges - Washers

CLOSED SATURDAY OPEN SUNDAY FREE DELIVERY Normal Installation within 24 Hours

PH. 889-0047 or 796-0264
Your Purchase Backed by Our Own Service Department Blue Chip Stamps

THE RAILROADER
FAMOUS MALTS - HAMBURGERS
Serving at REDLANDS • SAN BERNARDINO RIVERSIDE • HEMET • CLAREMONT
Our stock is publicly traded over the counter

HARVEST HOUSE BUFFET CENTRAL CITY MALL

ALL YOU CARE TO EAT \$1.89

Offering a variety of Meats and Vegetables at our low price of \$1.89.
Mon. thru Sat. continuous service 11-8
Sun. - continuous service 11-7