



Local rock group Straight.

Photo by Ted Kirk

Local rock group Straight shoots for national success

By Deb Gray

I. Oh, Lady Music
Singing all day long,
Long as we're together
We can't ever do no wrong. . .

—Edgar Winter

Making it in the rock music business takes more than Fender amps, more than a desire to make music, more than talent. It takes a marriage of managers, promotion agencies, engineers, radio stations, determination and luck.

Straight, a Nebraska rock band, should know. The band recorded a tape this summer in Devonshire Studios in North Hollywood, Calif.

This fall, they've waited. Waited while a business manager and producer 2,000 miles away finds a record contract to seal their future. That long wait and their lack of recognition in Nebraska is about over.

That's what Gary Osheroff, calling from Los Angeles, told drummer Lynn Elgert one Thursday evening in December. Osheroff said he and Sy Mitchell, Straight's producer, had formed their own record company, Encore Records, to market Straight's single *Save Your Breath*.

Contract offers

The group has had recording contract offers, but Osheroff said, "the situation is so hot we can't wait for the most lucrative offer."

Osheroff said he hopes he can make a record deal with a major label as *Save Your Breath* moves up the charts.

Earlier that December evening, the band sat in the living room of the house where they had practiced for more than a year, listening to radio station KOIL in Omaha, waiting for the disc jockey to play their single.

The first week in December was an important one in Straight's climb toward success: that week KOIL had agreed to air *Save Your Breath* and test listener reaction.

Response to the tune had been good, Elgert said. After two days, 70 listeners told KOIL they liked the song, two didn't like it, and two people said Straight sounded like Chicago.

Since KOIL first played the record, between 20 and 30 stations across the country have added *Save Your Breath* to their playing list, according to Elgert. The tune is now number 28 on KLMS' Top 30.

New manager

Straight now has a new promotion manager, Tom Ray of Los Angeles.

"He thinks he can get the song into the Top Five," said Dave Buchholz, composer of *Save Your Breath*. "Out of the last 18 singles he's promoted, 16 have been gold."

So after two-and-one-half years, Straight believes it is nearing the mythical land of "making it"—a paradise where bucks drop in like manna and where musicians reign as demigods.

The odds for success in the music business are heavily stacked with ifs and buts. The successful reach dizzying peaks of wealth and adulation.

And nine musicians—Lynn Elgert, Dave Buchholz, Tom Ensley, Dennis "Putz" Stearns, Scott Best, Tim Quance, Randy Nygaard, Arthur "Bucky" McCann and Ric Teller—believe in mountaintops.

II. Somewhere over the rainbow

Skies are blue
And the dreams that you dare to dream
Really do come true. . .

from *The Wizard of Oz*

Some people might accuse Lynn Elgert of riding rainbows, forgetting that they fade with the sun.

But without Elgert, the band might not be where it is today, for as guitarist Putz Stearns once put it, "He had the nerve to tell the major record companies, 'Hey, listen to us!'"

Elgert said Straight has changed since it was a rock band in Hastings five years ago. There are no original Straight members left, he said. Elgert joined the band three years ago.

Other members of the band giggered in Nebraska bands before joining Straight. The band has alumni from Duck, Wind Song, the Elastic Band and Patchwork.

Top-40 tunes

At first, Straight's repertoire relied on Top-40 hits, Elgert said. But that changed about a year ago, he said.

"We decided that we were going to starve and play original material. We didn't want to be another Top-40 band. It's been hard for some of us to get along financially for a while."

Things began clicking for the band last March, Elgert said.

"We started having neat musical ideas together," he said. "We started thinking together as a group."

A year ago, two record producers contacted Straight. London Records liked the tape which the band had sent them and offered them studio time in either Denver or New York, Elgert said.

But then Sy Mitchell called from Los Angeles. Mitchell was probably told about Straight by Robert Lamm, Chicago's keyboard player, Elgert said.

He said Lamm first injected rockstar adrenalin into the group.

"Bob heard an early tape that we'd made and said that we had a lot of potential. He told us to get into a house and practice our heads off. And that's what we did."

Chose producer

When they had to pick between two producers, neither of whom they had seen, the band chose Mitchell. He was better known, Elgert said, and he had more than 35 gold records to his credit. Mitchell has engineered records for Chicago, Janis Joplin, Barbra Streisand, and produces Red Bone.

For the last two-and-one-half years, Elgert said he has treaded a barbed wire fantasy between frustration and success. What will he do if the band fails?

"Well, during the last four months I've had offers to play with Woody Herman and Jimmy Dorsey, among others, where I could be earning at least \$300 a week," he said. "I also have a friend with a lot of ins in Washington, D.C., who said he could line me up with a lot of jobs. And I've been to Canada and think the market there is wide open."

But, Elgert said, he will never leave this band until every last hope and alternative is squeezed out. Membership in a rock band is an oath of loyalty, he said.

"When you join some band, you dedicate yourself to that band no matter what happens. You put everything you have into it. That way if things don't work out, it's not your fault."

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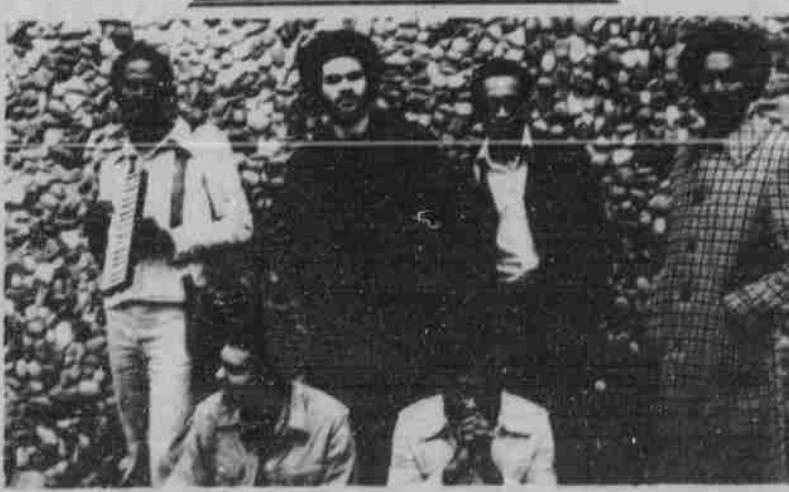
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