

## arts & entertainment

### B.J.'s bout with death renewed faith, brought happiness, financial rewards

By Kathy Foreman

B.J. Thomas has been through a lot of changes in his 35 years, the most recent and dramatic of which he shared with a sparse concert crowd at Pershing Municipal Auditorium Sunday night.

Dressed in Levi's and a midnight-blue velvet blazer, Thomas looked out into the crowd and gave his testimony.

"I've got to thank the Lord for letting me be with you tonight," he said to about 450 persons. "I could have been dead from drugs by now, but the Lord saw fit to save me and now I'm a Christian."

After the concert, Thomas said his "born-again Christian experience" came in Texas in January, 1976. The hollows of his cheeks sunken, and his face haggard from former hard times, Thomas explained the circumstances leading to his conversion.

"I was a 12-year drug addict (speed, cocaine, and Valium). I had a broken marriage and my personal and physical shape was bad . . . trashed."

#### Popping pills

The Houston native said he started popping pills in 1968 after a stab wound punctured one lung. Thomas said that to keep performing, he used speed to keep up his energy and Valium to keep down the pain. However, after the wound healed, he discovered he was a drug addict, he said.

"I tried to stop several times," the singer drawled.

"But every time I did, I'd have epileptic-like fits and tear things and wreck cars and not remember . . ."

Looking down at his cowboy boots, Thomas momentarily appeared to relive the anguish of those hard times.

"I had 12 of those fits in 1974 and so I gave up fighting it (the addiction) and hit the pills harder than ever."

Thomas, who said he had an aunt die from a morphine addiction, said he also had a brush with death. Leaning forward, a silver cross peeking through his shirt, Thomas said, "I was in a plane in 1975 and I died in the air. They couldn't get a pulse and my fingernails turned black."

#### Addiction behind him

However, Thomas said with God's help the drug addiction is behind him and most of his publicity now comes from his conversion.

"I realize they want models for the young," the green-eyed singer said. "But I get kind of embarrassed when they make such a big thing out of my conversion."

While his newly found religion has brought Thomas personal happiness, it also has brought him financial rewards, he said. Taking a long drag on his cigarette, Thomas smiled and said his record, "Home Where I Belong" has been number one on the gospel charts for two months. The record, which Thomas said he is sure "the Lord has blessed", also has earned Thomas a



Photo by Mark Billingsley

B.J. Thomas has gone from popping pills to singing gospel.

crack at the Dove Gospel Music awards in November.

#### Career on rise

A.M. radio listeners know that Thomas' pop music career also is on the rise. His latest single, a remake of the Beach Boys' "Don't Worry Baby" is in the top twenty of the pop charts. Glancing at a diamond-studded horseshoe ring worn on his right hand, Thomas insists he is not making a comeback.

"It's my style to be hot for a year or two then drop out of sight for a while then get hot again." Jerry Thomas, B.J.'s brother and road manager, said Thomas is hot again, with all the bookings on his current tour (except Lincoln) being sell-outs.

Although the Lincoln crowd was small, it was responsive and enthusiastic. Teen-age girls lined the front of the stage and shrieked as Thomas walked toward them. The whole crowd joined the soft-voiced singer in the chorus of "Somebody Done Somebody Wrong Song."

## Wishbone Ash second effort is second-rate album

By Jeff Taebel

It has been four years since Wishbone Ash came out with their classic album, *Argus*, and after listening to their new release, *Front Page News*, it becomes painfully evident that the quality is not equal to the first. As a matter of fact, it is not even close.

### music review

Wishbone Ash members are: Martin Turner on bass and lead vocals, Andy Powell on lead guitar and mandolin, Steve Upton on drums and Laurie Wisefeld on guitar and vocals (replacing the band's original guitarist Ted Turner).

The major problem with this lineup is that when Turner left, he took Wishbone's capacity for creating the incredibly powerful dual guitar leads that were the band's

trademark in its *Argus* days. The lyrical spirit and beautiful melodies that made some of its old songs, most notably "Warrior" and "Throw Down the Sword," so enjoyable also are gone.

Side one opens with three immediately forgettable losers: "Front Page News," "Midnight Dancer" and "Goodbye Baby, Hello Friend." No, these tunes won't make you forget any of Wishbone's earlier work, but they might make you remember that headache that has been bothering you. But the fourth track, "Surface to Air," is where things really begin to take off, if you'll pardon the expression.

The song begins with the first interesting vocal arrangement on the album. Never mind that it sounds vaguely reminiscent of the Beatles' "I Want You (She's So Heavy)." With lines like: "abrasion is wearing you away/all you want to do is go out and play," how can you go wrong? With Martin Turner vocalizing, it's likely to remind you of John Mayall in his least guarded, most pretentious moments.

#### Short instrumental

Side one closes with a short instrumental, "714,"

which starts out unassumingly enough until the listener is hit with cascades of strings, possibly in an attempt to achieve an interesting guitar/orchestra effect, a la Jeff Beck's version of "Diamond Dust." The fact this does not work matters little, as it gives the listener a well-deserved rest from lyrics.

Side two is somewhat better, kicking things off with a couple of near-rockers, "Come in from the Rain" and "Right or Wrong." Powell's guitar work on these two songs probably is his best on the album. Unfortunately, they are nothing you probably have not heard before. You might want to skip the undistinguished "Heart Beat" to get to the fourth cut, the touching "Day I Found Your Love", as this is the saddest song on the album (in every respect).

The second side closes with "Diamond Jack." This song contains some nice harmony guitar work and the vocals are listenable, but it never really gets going. Nevertheless, when I hear this closing number, I'm filled with a warm, rich feeling because I know that this album finally is over and I can listen to something with some life in it. Maybe I'll play *Argus* next.

## Funnymen show comedy universal

By Charlie Krig

Henny Youngman and Kelly Monteith: their styles are truly "Comedy of Then and Now," but their abilities to make people laugh Sunday proved to be universal.

The two comedians performed as the first performance of the Union Program Council symposium on laughter, "Tickle Your Fancy." The audience, composed of persons of every age, responded enthusiastically to both men with laughs and applause.

But in spite of the performer's differences in style, subject and age, they agreed on several points during interviews before the show.

"College audiences are fine—very good," Youngman said. Monteith agreed, saying college audiences allow performers freedom of expression.

The men also had common problems during their rise to fame. Youngman said that during his school days he often went to the vaudeville shows instead of reporting to the school detention center after being thrown out of class for cracking jokes.

After that he performed with a band, but one night the comedian didn't show up so Youngman said he went on stage to tell the jokes he had learned. That is where his trademark, the violin, emerged.

Still, Youngman had not thought about being a comedian.

"My career is really a dream because I never prepared for anything," he said.

Monteith said he started out in drama school but then turned to comedy, working his way up from coffeehouses to strip joints to Playboy clubs and finally to television.

He said the strip joints "taught me how to survive and how to handle myself," with more training coming from handling the hecklers than from trying to develop style.

"It's good training. You do it because you gotta' be there," Youngman said about his work in Las Vegas strip joints. "It was grueling in those years."

"It's horrendous," Monteith said. "You sweat in areas you never knew you sweated before. Especially if you



You call that music? Comedians Kelly Monteith (left) and Henny Youngman. Photo by Bob Pearson

have to walk out of the theatre through the audience." Youngman said comedians must play the audience and never leave themselves open to trouble.

"You must be above the audience. You must be able to handle them. If you can't, you don't belong on stage," he said.

Television also proved to be the catalyst for recognition in both men's careers.

"Nobody would know you without it (television)," Youngman said.

Monteith said his summer replacement comedy series was a good experience and he wouldn't mind doing it again, but with more time and money to "do it right."

"You've got to put it on whether it's good or not," Monteith said.

In spite of their common ideas, the men practiced widely different techniques on stage.

Youngman, 71, "in showbiz for 45 (years) and before that, starving," had a take-it-or-leave-it attitude. He has been around long enough that he can afford to be brusque. Youngman comes in for an appearance wearing his performance suit, goes on stage and immediately afterward takes off for the next show.

The 34-year-old Monteith said he takes time to relax and make sure his hosts are comfortable, too. He said he still is waiting for his big break so he thinks about making the right impression.