

BILL AND SUE-ON HILLMAN A 50-YEAR MUSICAL ODYSSEY

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ONE

TWO

THREE

FOUR

FIVE

SIX

SEVEN

EIGHT

NINE

CDs



BILL AND SUE-ON HILLMAN RECORD ALBUM #1

THE WESTERN UNION I:

Galaxy Records ~ GSLP 1012 ~ 1969-70

Bill and Sue-On Hillman ~ Barry Forman ~ Jake Kroeger

[ALBUM 1](#): Credits ~ Photos ~ Anecdotes ~ Lyrics ~ Reviews ~ MP3 Files

www.hillmanweb.com/albums/album01.html

BEHIND THE SCENES

By late 1969 we had pretty much touched all show biz bases: bars, concerts, tours, TV & Radio, exhibitions media coverage, etc. The logical progression now seemed to be to get something on record. This was a very difficult undertaking at that time as there were no professional studios in the area. Nor was there anyone who knew anything about getting original songs published, record production, manufacture, distribution, promotion, etc. In our search for contacts we found that about the only records being produced in Manitoba were ethnic (largely Ukrainian) and gospel.

Enter Alex Moodrey, who had produced and distributed a number of Ukainian music albums on his Winnipeg label, *Galaxy Records*. The deal we made with Alex was that he would record us in his studio, pay for the pressing and jackets, and would then have rights to our album which he would distribute through his network of shops selling Ukrainian and ethnic music - which included stores in Chicago, of all places. All we would have to do would be to promise to buy a few hundred records. His profit on our guaranteed purchase would cover all costs of production and manufacture of 1000 albums and then anything he sold beyond that would be to his pocket.

At the time, the deal sounded like a good initiation into one facet of the business that was still a bit of a mystery to us. So, we went into rehearsals. Since there were four of us in the *Western Union* at that time, we decided that we would each be featured on three songs -- this meant that Sue-On and I would have one whole side of the proposed album to ourselves. We chose a mix of songs we were familiar with, along with a few more obscure "classics" that we thought were long overdue for fresh exposure.

Barry did three fiddle numbers: We had been adapting Cajun-type fiddle material into our stage shows because they lended themselves to the more driving sound we were starting to get with the heavy backbeat Sue-On was now getting out of her new drum kit and the more biting sound I was eking out of the Fender Telecaster guitar that was starting to replace my Gretsch. Barry's first instrumental was a Cajun number by Don Rich of Buck Owens' Buckaroos - *Down on the Bayou*. He followed this up with our country rock-flavoured version of the old folk song - *Eighth of January*, better known as *The Battle of New Orleans*. Barry has always done an excellent job on old time waltzes so it was natural that his next choice would feature the beautiful, *Twilight Waltz*. A regret that we all shared on Barry's numbers was that we didn't hire a session bass player. Barry played bass on everyone's songs except his own - for which he moved to fiddle.

Jake has a great voice for ballads, so his first choice - *Hangin' On* - was a good one. It also gave me a chance to experiment with the recently-installed Bigsby tremolo bar and home-made B-bender on my Tele to try to come up with steel guitar sounds. Jake's next choice was Merle Haggard's *Branded Man*. A bit of a thrill for me as I got to sing on my first record. Jake comes from a church background where he grew up singing in choirs and quartets. As a result he has a good grasp of harmony -- an area I was very weak in, since on most of my duets with Sue-On, she had always sung the harmony parts. In our stage shows then, I would sing lead to the chorus of his *Branded Man* and he would take the harmony parts. Since voice-overs were not possible on this session, we decided to do the song as we had always done it on stage. His third song was the Hank Williams classic, *I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry*.

Sue-On opened our side with the beautiful Lefty Frizzell waltz ballad, *Mom and Dad Waltz* - a song that we thought was ready for exposure. One of her show-stopping stage songs was *Silver Threads and Golden Needles* to which we had worked out a rock arrangement. Then, for a change of pace, she chose one of the most requested songs from our TV shows: *Tiny Bubbles* - a song I got to try harmony on. Sue-On has really an amazing voice. In a matter of seconds she can switch from projecting uptempo songs where she barely needs a mic, to soft, whispery and throaty ballads.

For my quarter of the album I chose two guitar instrumentals and an old Red Foley song -- *Chattanooga Shoe Shine Boy* - a number that I used to like as a kid. It's a song with good rhythm potential and is a lot of fun to sing. My first instrumental was a country standard -- *The Steel Guitar Rag* -- in an arrangement I had worked out on the Telecaster. In keeping with our trying to do three entirely different types of songs I chose a medley of a couple rock/blues tunes for my second instrumental: Freddie King's *Hide Away* and the Wailers/Kingsmen hit, *Louie Louie*. We've always had a habit of trying to work as maximum number of song titles onto a session or stage show.

Being limited to three numbers each, we all put a lot of thought into the choosing of these numbers. We had a few rehearsals at Jake's farm near Rapid City but were a little nervous and a whole lot excited when we finally carried our gear into the "big time" recording studio. Also joining us on the session was Warren Hanna, a drummer I had worked with in rock bands a few years back, but we hadn't been able to get together for

a full rehearsal with him. All of us were more than a little bewildered at the location of the studio: The Winnipeg Grain Exchange. Alex Moodrey's Galaxy Recording Studio was actually some sort of all-in-one portable system which he somehow wrangled permission to set up for the day in a room in this Main Street old office building. When we arrived on Saturday morning -- November 29, 1969 -- It wasn't quite what we expected: linoleum floor, bare walls, street and corridor noise, engineer Alex sitting on a rickety old wooden chair behind a stereo reel-to-reel recorder perched on sort of a kitchen chrome table, and a half dozen cables leading to mics scattered around the room. Everything would be recorded live to tape, without the benefit of baffles, EQ, reverb, DI, overdubbing or even enough mics. A whole lotta trial and error. The play backs we listened to after recording each number were not too promising, but we gave it a game try. Alex promised us that everything would be fixed in the mix... mmmm... what mix?... and echo would be added down east at the mastering plant. We couldn't help but wonder just how they were going to change the sound of poor Warren's kick drum which sounded like some sort of giant Salvation Army bass drum. Somehow, after a long day's work, we got the twelve songs down, signed releases and binding contracts and then five shell-shocked musicians stumbled out onto Portage and Main -- we didn't feel much like recording stars.

The next stage of this project was to supply Galaxy with a band photo to put on the record jacket. The people at CKX-TV and Radio were very obliging -- we were one of the first bands in the area to put out a record album, and since we had done shows at CKX for many years, they readily supplied a photographer and the use of their studio so that we could pose with a TV camera in front of one of our sets.

When the final product arrived we were happy with the look of it but the finished mix was a shock -- delay echo on every voice and every instrument... Whew! Like no record I'd ever heard before... or since -- botched in post production -- but even so, it had its satisfying moments. Because of our TV show and regular live performances, the record sold pretty well -- but, foreshadowing the situation in years to come and the success of future releases, we didn't sell any in our home towns. Still seeking acceptance, a few years later, we even went so far as to do hometown tribute albums and actually featured the hometown area in a chapter for a college-level geography textbook I was commissioned to write for Brandon University and the University of Manitoba. The book is in its third printing but we have yet to sell one locally.

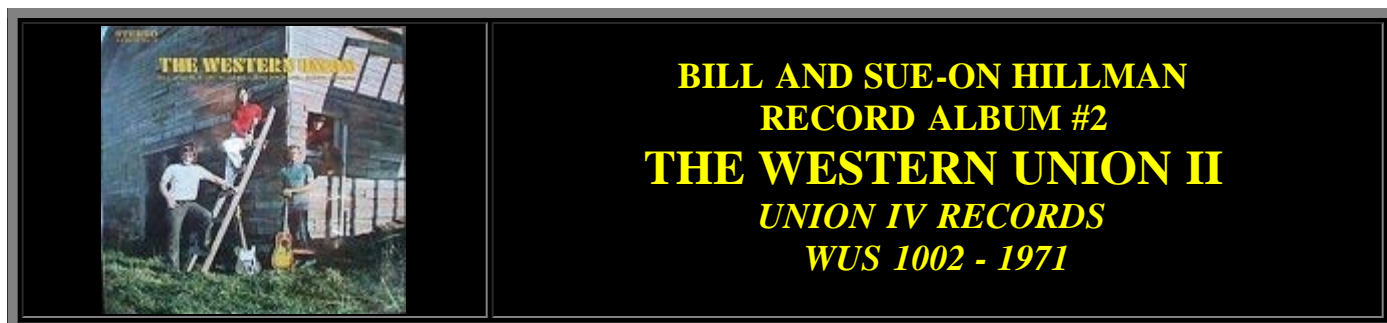
This stumbling, humbling debut experience in the recording world only seemed to whet our appetites. We learned from our mistakes and benefited from the experience, and a year later we were about to embark on our second recording venture -- the first of a long line of independent recordings for which we would retain complete control and ownership.

Regrets... we had a few:

- Mr. Moodrey used half of the space on the back cover of our record jacket to advertise his other artists and their Ukrainian records. Being on an ethnic label and this strong association with a stable of Ukrainian artists didn't really present a true representation of the type of music we played and we ended up being promoted to the wrong audience.
- We gave away all rights to the material. It may yet come back to haunt us.
- The band didn't hire a bass player to play on Barry's fiddle numbers. Moodrey compensated for the missing bass by putting a mic even closer to Warren's already booming bass drum.
- The band didn't have enough rehearsal time with Warren Hanna, who was an

- experienced rock drummer but, one who hadn't done a lot of work with country bands.
- We asked Alex if he could add echo on some of the vocals as they were flat and lifeless. He said it could be done in the mastering plant in Ontario. The people at the mastering plant immersed everything with actual echo delay with multi delay repeats on every song. This would have been fine on vocals, but, there were only two tracks so the slap-back echo affected every instrument - including the drums. A jumbled aural mess!
 - Many of the credits we had supplied were left off the liner notes -- much to Warren's chagrin as he wasn't mentioned anywhere on the record.
 - I had been worried that the hum from my guitar's Echoplex tape echo effects unit would be picked up. I needn't have worried. Alex's system masked it with much bigger hums and hisses... and runaway echo.
 - We had absolutely no control over what Galaxy did in the final sound, manufacture, promotion, or distribution of our product.

[UP TO NAVIGATION GUIDE](#)



[ALBUM 2: Credits ~ Photos ~ Anecdotes ~ Lyrics ~ Reviews ~ MP3 Files](#)
www.hillmanweb.com/albums/album02.html

OFF-TRACK AND BEHIND THE SCENES

None of us were very happy with our first record album which was done on Winnipeg's Galaxy Records. But we had been bitten by the bug and we were sure we could do much better if we had more control over the process. A few years earlier, while performing at the very first Morris Manitoba Stampede Rodeo, we met the Hildebrand and Paley brothers who were well known in Winnipeg as Ronnie and the Eternals. Now, in 1971, about a year after our Galaxy "fiasco," I saw a news item that the former Eternals were opening a modern 8-track studio on King Edward Street in Winnipeg. Sue-On and I paid their new studio a visit. It turned out that they hadn't opened yet, and we spent much of our visit helping the guys tack acoustic tiles to the walls. We were impressed with their enthusiasm and with the modern equipment they were installing -- and they assured us that their studio sound, when operational, would be far superior to that which came out of Galaxy's makeshift set up in the Grain Exchange. The drums were properly baffled, separated and miked. The control room was separated from the studio area by class and insulation. The 8-track Ampex multi-track recorder which used one-inch-wide tape on 10 inch metal spools was pretty high tech for the time and there was an impressive array of quality mics and sound processing effects units.

Our next step was to talk the other band members into doing a second album -- and assuring them that we could come up with a much better product if we financed it and produced it ourselves in a real recording studio. To expand our sound a bit we planned

to add a few musicians to the band line-up. Sue-On felt that she wasn't ready to play session drums yet and preferred to concentrate full-time on her vocal tracks. The choice of a session drummer was easy. The studio had already worked hard at developing a good studio drum sound using Ted Paley, one of the studio owners and drummer for the Eternals group.

We were studying geography at Brandon University at the time, and had developed a friendship with many of the profs. Coincidentally, one of the new lecturers in the department was Larry Clark -- the same Larry Clark who had sat in on drums on our old CKX-TV noon shows back in the early '60s. Larry was a well-known jazz musician in the Brandon area, and for years had played organ nightly at the Suburban Restaurant. Larry offered to sweeten and expand our sound by arranging and playing piano, vibes and organ on the session. This was a real boon as it was before synthesizers became a staple in the recording process, and thanks to the multi-track recording process, Larry ended up playing one to three instruments on every track.

The luxury of having eight recorded tracks to play with opened many doors for us. Sue-On now could overdub harmonies on her solos and we could double track and add more harmonies to our duets. I could now lay down acoustic rhythm tracks as well as adding more than one lead guitar line to our songs. Barry could play bass behind his fiddle solos. We even experimented with different percussion sounds: hand claps, tambourine, slapping guitar cases, etc. The big problem with all this experimentation however, was that we soon learned that we were limited by having only 8 tracks - it necessitated careful planning and even bouncing and combining tracks.

As with our first album, each of us was responsible for doing three songs.

Jake did a country ballad, *Raggedy Ann*. His uptempo number was a Bobby Goldsboro song, *Muddy Mississippi Line*. We liked the arrangement so much on this one that we placed it as lead off song on side one of the album. A few years later, after Jake had left the group, Sue-On and I used the backing tracks and redid the vocal. We then re-released our version of the song on album number 4. Jake's third song was a cover of the Frank Isfield hit, *I Remember You*, complete with the falsetto tricks.

Barry did a fiddle medley of *The Irish Washerwoman* and *Cock of the North* - a medley we called *Irish-Scotch*. His uptempo choice was based on a Cajun theme that he called *Fiddle Duddle* - this was around the time that Prime Minister Trudeau uttered his famous "fuddle duddle" line in Parliament. For a change of pace he then did the famous Bob Wills number, *Maiden's Prayer*. I did guitar solos on all three.

Sue-On's first ballad was the beautiful title song from an old Burt Lancaster western movie, *The Kentuckian Song*. This had always been a favourite of mine but we couldn't find a copy of any recording of it. I remembered, though, that the Ray Little CKY touring western show had featured the words in a souvenir song book I had bought at one of their shows in Strathclair's Bend Theatre back in the mid-'50s. I finally found the booklet in one of my piles of old memorabilia, and relying on memory, taught the song to Sue-On. It was a natural for her and is one of my all-time favourite Sue-On songs. Her second song was another of our stage medleys ~ two country ballad classics: Don Gibson's *Sweet Dreams* and *Born To Lose*. We segued into *Born To Lose* with a guitar solo and key change.

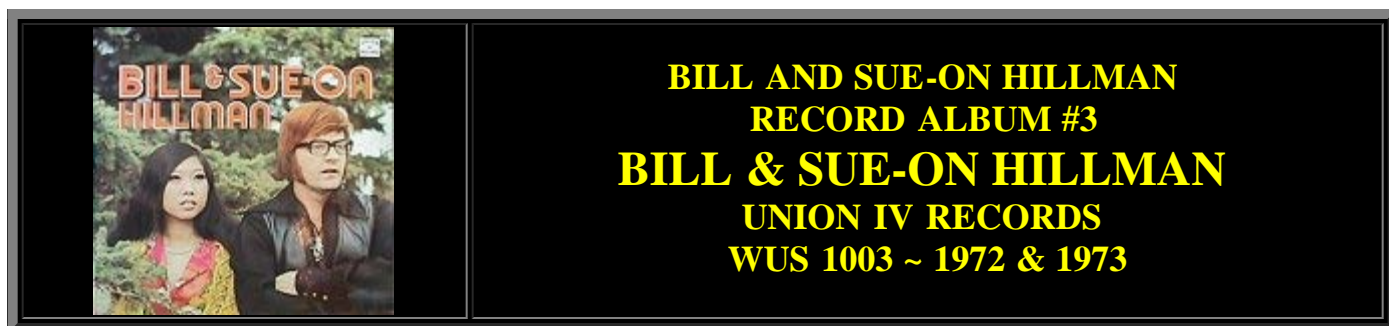
Reflecting our growing fondness for duets, we did an electric version of Ian and Sylvia's *On My Mind* on which Larry played percussive organ riffs. Our second duet was the Gene McLellan gospel song, *Put Your Hand in the Hand*. We were really excited about

how these turned out, and in our naivety we even got a copy of the album to Ian Tyson after one of his concerts. We were blissfully unaware of the complexities of performance copyrights, royalties, or any of that end of the business. (Being avid fans we also went so far as to tape his live concert using the revolutionary Phillips portable cassette recorder.)

Again drawing upon what worked for us on stage, I put together a three-song rock medley of '50s hits by Jerry Lee Lewis, Fats Domino and Buddy Holly. A problem we had that carried on through most of our future sessions was that we often played numbers too closely to how we did them on stage, with the result being that the tempo was often too fast and the vocal pitch too high. This medley really chugged along, however, and by the end of it you can hear the fatigue setting in on Ted's drum beat. This was the last album on which we featured a guitar solo. I put the solos on the back burner, partly because guitar instrumentals are so exacting, and partly because my dream had been to someday record an entire guitar instrumental album. I chose *Apache* for this, our first guitar solo on a multi-track session, as it was one that I hadn't been able to do on stage because of our instrumentation. But now, in the studio I could overdub all guitar parts: a couple acoustic rhythms and two lead parts. By this time I had customized my Telecaster by adding a Bigsby, homemade B-Bender and re-wired pickups. I played through a DeArmond volume/tone pedal, into an Echochord tape delay echo unit and through a Fender Twin Reverb amp. The arrangement I came up with on this Jerry Lordan instrumental was about three equal parts of Jorgen Ingman and Shadows versions, with my own riffs using the B-bender and volume pedal.

Our stage sound was really beefed up and sweetened by Larry's keyboard and vibes arrangements on each number. The sound of the vibes was especially interesting as this distinctive instrument is used too seldom on recordings. The album sold pretty well off stage and we may even have broken even on our investment. It proved to be a pretty good promotional vehicle and got us media coverage as well as airplay on local radio stations and CBC. It also gave us something to feature on our stage and TV shows and was a nice package to flog to promoters. But more importantly, it got our creative juices flowing. Sue-On and I started thinking about doing a solo album, and we realized that we would get very little airplay or recognition by just recording cover tunes. I started to write.

[UP TO NAVIGATION GUIDE](#)



[ALBUM 3: Credits ~ Photos ~ Anecdotes ~ Lyrics ~ Reviews ~ MP3 Files](#)
www.hillmanweb.com/albums/album03.html

LINER NOTES

For Bill and Sue-On Hillman, 1966 was a memorable year. It marked the beginning of a partnership in marriage as well as in music. This musical partnership led to the formation of the Western Union, which in turn, led to scores of dance dates, television

and radio appearances, and stage shows across Canada.

Sue-On, born in China, moved to the small prairie town of Newdale, Manitoba, at age ten. Here she became involved in choir work and completed seven years of classical training in piano. It was also here that she met future husband Bill Hillman of nearby Strathclair who encouraged her to take up guitar and drums and to start singing professionally. The third member of the Western Union group is the well-known bassist-fiddler, Barry Forman of Rivers, Manitoba. On tour, this popular trio is augmented by two more Strathclair musicians -- Kerry Morris and Kevin Pahl.

Both Sue-On and Bill are also qualified high school teachers with degrees in Science, Arts and Education. They share a wide range of other interests which include travelling, photography, and song-writing (Bill wrote four of the songs on this album). Sue-On's special interests are cooking exotic dishes, spinning, gardening and movies. Bill is a 'notorious' collector of books, records, musical instruments and just about anything that comes his way. He has, in fact, compiled one of Canada's largest tape and disc collections of old radio programs from the 1930s, '40s and '50s.

This variety of interests coupled with their love for all kinds of music has resulted in an exciting style which has combined elements of country, rock, folk and pop music.

OFF TRACK AND BEHIND THE SCENES

Not long after the release of our second album, singer/rhythm guitarist Jake Kroeger left the group and we were again a trio. Over the next three decades a number of friends have filled the third man spot, but we have remained a trio to this day. In the fall of '71 we moved from Brandon and back to our Maple Grove home where I resumed my teaching job at Strathclair Collegiate. Despite our busy schedule of TV and dance work, preparing new curricula, remodelling our country home, and commuting (Sue-On was finishing her Bachelor of Education degree at Brandon University), I worked at writing original material for the next recording session -- a session for which we had already started setting money aside. The first song I wrote was for my beloved grandmother, Katie Campbell -- Nannie, who had always been so supportive of our music. She died on Christmas day, 1971. This song seemed far too personal to share with the world, so I moved on to more commercial themes. A metaphor used in a Nancy Wilson song had fired my imagination: the comparison of a flowing river to a woman... or a man... with wanderlust. It was a theme I developed for the song, *[Blue Shallow River](#)*.

It was, and is, common for us to try to put our own touch on songs we learn, rather than to just imitate arrangements found on record. As a result we come up with intros, breaks, rhythms that, although unusual, and sometimes 'against the grain', often worked for us. Sometimes these hooks, beats, or riffs are strong enough to inspire me to write whole songs around them. The next song I wrote is an example of such a song. We had been using this choppy driving rhythm on a number of our stage songs and one day, while fooling around with it, I came up with a verse and chorus for what turned out to be *[Blues 'Round My Door](#)*.

The first two originals were basically duets, so now I tried my hand at some ballads for Sue-On: *[Two Loving Arms](#)* and the oriental flavoured *[In Sadness](#)*. Once Sue-On and I had our first four originals sort of polished and worked out there was nothing that could hold us back from booking studio time.

Since we were financing the sessions and the planned album that was to come from them, we picked out eight of our favourite cover tunes to round out a whole album. For

her solo spots, Sue-On chose Kristofferson's *Help Me Make It Through The Night*, Lara's *Theme (Somewhere My Love)* from the movie *Dr. Zhivago*, and the Lucille Starr hit, *The French Song*, which she sang in French. On all of these songs she worked out her own voice-over double-tracked harmonies.

I have been a fan of the Everly Brothers since we opened for them in a concert back in 1965 (See the [Gig Notes Section](#)). Their thrilling harmonies have influenced just about every rock and country group that relies on harmony, including the [Beatles](#). Since many of our best duet numbers are Everly inspired, it seemed natural that we try our hand at one of their biggest hits: *Let It Be Me* - a song we have done countless times since in concerts, at weddings and on television. The next duet was a driving version of the Merle Haggard country hit: *Mama Tried*. While trying to adapt it to a danceable duet version and fooling around with the Hag's original intro, I found myself jokingly playing the riff from the Monkee's *Last Train to Clarksville*. It stuck, and that's what we ended up using on the record. We also adapted two more fairly recent hits to our duet style: *Down In The Boondocks* and *24 Hours From Tulsa*. The final song on the session was a favourite back in our pub-playing days: *The Green, Green Grass of Home*. Sue-On soloed on most of this but I tried my hand at harmony on the chorus, and did a melodramatic narration that would have done Walter Brennan proud.

A few years earlier, while we were still going to Brandon University and living with Sue-On's brother, Kenny Choy and his wife, Rebecca, they had brought back a Pentax camera for us from one of their trips to Hong Kong. This started me on a photography kick that continues to this day. It seemed natural then, that we do our own photography for the album jacket. The front cover was taken in front of the stone fence and spruce trees at the entrance to our Maple Grove country home where my family has lived since 1878. These trees were planted by my grandfather sometime after the turn of the century (See [John Campbell, Pioneer](#)). The black and white photo on the back of the album was taken in the ruins of a stone barn built by my great grandfather in the late 19th century. Creating our own photos involved my setting the timer on the camera and then scrambling up a stone wall to fall into an heroic eagle-like pose with my much more photogenic partner.

As with any photo shoot, there is a bit of a story behind the chosen costumes. Sue-On's flowery dress was made by our sister-in-law, Rebecca, while my black shirt was sewn by my Grandmother, Jane Hillman. The yellow shawl and weird medallion made of horseshoe nails we had recently picked up in Mexico on a trip taken at the end of one of our annual Federal Grain summer tours across Western Canada. The system of haggling we used at the Mexican market involved our making an offer in English, listening to the Mexicans confer in Spanish, and then discussing their return offer in Chinese - a language which I pretended to know fluently. This technique never ceased to bewilder the salespeople and usually resulted in our coming away with a pretty good deal. Sue-On wore a gold chain that was presented to her by her grandfather when she [left Hong Kong at age ten](#). The specs of course were my best Buddy Holly horn rims.

We took our photos and liner notes into a Winnipeg graphics shop that specialized in colour separations and album covers. The master 1/4 inch stereo tapes were sent to Toronto for mastering. While this was going on we set plans for a 45 rpm release in motion. To get maximum value for our money we had our four originals pressed on an Extended Play album for which we had the local Leech Printing run off slipcover jackets. Before we could release the original material I had to form a publishing company, Maple Grove Music, and register the four songs with BMI (PRO). The original "single" got some good airplay and recognition but one of the most gratifying bits of encouragement came from the [BMI magazine, Music Scene](#), which gave *In Sadness* a

rave review.

Album Regrets

There is audible hiss on some of the tracks, much of it from my noisy Echoplex echo unit. This \$800 unit was my pride and joy as it was an effect used by some of my favourite guitar players, including Hank Marvin of the Shadows and Randy Bachman of [Chad Allan and the Reflections](#) (The Guess Who?). When we first started playing Brandon pubs we had incorporated it into our PA system... much to the bewilderment of many of the inebriated regulars: "War's duh eko comin' frum?" Sadly, the unit never worked right after a trailer rolling incident during the [Federal Grain Train](#) Troupe's first tour of the West. One of the first things I looked for when we came upon the wreckage was my German-made, metal-cased, echo unit. We finally found it under the demolished trailer where it had been driven half-way into the ground by the full weight of the trailer. I lovingly dug it out, cleaned the dirt out of it, pushed the tubes back into their sockets, pounded out the metal housing, and plugged it in: it worked! . . . but it was never quite the same.

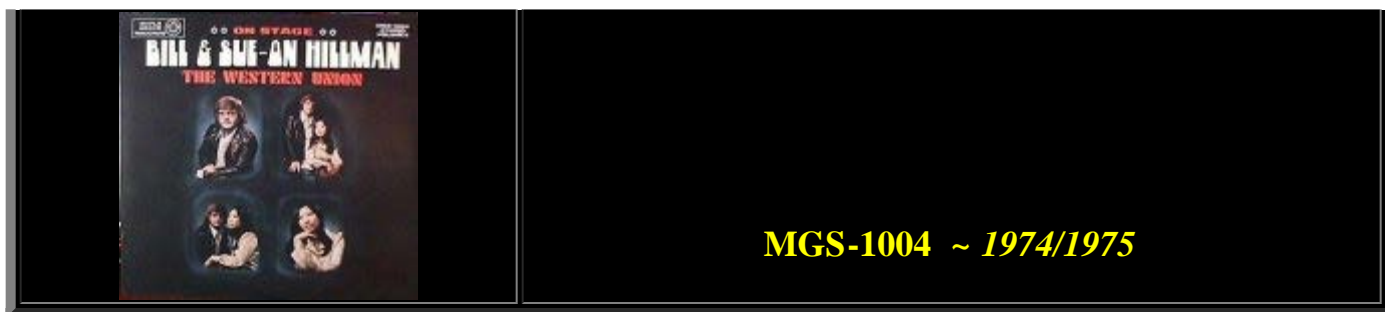
My echo, B-bender, Bigsby and volume pedal were prominently featured on *Somewhere My Love*. It was only after we had completed the bed tracks and instrument solo tracks that I discovered a quite noticeable "sproing" in the middle of this solo. This was bewildering until I realized that the spring on the Bigsby unit had caught and slipped during the solo. Since we were working under a tight budget, we didn't have time to redo it.

The four originals were done in an earlier session and the EQ mix was for a 45 rpm single release. As a result the sound is much hotter than the rest of the songs on the album.

Using a method that what would become the routine for most of our future albums, we did all the bed tracks in one session, in one day, and took a dub of these backing tracks home to listen to for a week before we returned the next weekend to do the vocals and mix. Naturally, when we had more time to study the day's work, we found a few flaws. A few of the songs were far too fast. By this time I was really into tape recording. For years I had been trading with other collectors of radio shows from the Golden Days of Radio - '30s through the '50s - and had amassed a collection of about 10,000 programs: *Shadow*, *Fibber McGee & Molly*, *Jack Benny*, *Suspense*, *Lux Theatre*, *Lone Ranger*, etc. One of the tape machines I used to correct the pitch of some of these old programmes was a Revox recorder with a pitch control. When we discovered that some of the tracks we had laid down were bounding along at a pace that made them hard to sing, I experimented with slowing them down. Another serious problem arose with the song *24 Hours From Tulsa*. We had left out a few beats in the spot where the song goes "She said... beat... beat... OK... beat... beat." Panic time! Finally, rather than redo the whole song we decided to shorten it to "She said OK... beat... beat." No one ever seemed to notice . . . until now :)

[UP TO NAVIGATION GUIDE](#)

**BILL and SUE-ON HILLMAN
RECORD ALBUM VOLUME 4
ON STAGE
Maple Grove Records**



[ALBUM 4: Credits ~ Photos ~ Anecdotes ~ Lyrics ~ Reviews ~ MP3 Files](#)
www.hillmanweb.com/albums/album04.html

LINER NOTES

Bill and Sue-On Hillman are certainly no strangers to the prairie music scene. They have spent many successful summers as a feature act with Bardine Productions of Portland, Oregon, headlining Grandstand Shows at Canadian Exhibitions and Western USA State and County fairs. For six years previous to this they performed as a back-up band and feature act on the Russ Gurr Federal Grain Train Show -- performing at every major fair and rodeo in Western Canada.

Sue-On is a rarity -- and oriental girl drummer with dynamite stage presence, knockout good looks and a unique sensuous voice equally adept with tender love ballads or driving show stoppers. Sue-On was born in southern China but fled with her family to Hong Kong during the Communist Revolution. Later, she moved to the small prairie town of Newdale, Manitoba. Here she became involved in choir work and completed seven years of classical training on piano. It was also here that she met future husband Bill Hillman of nearby Strathclair who encouraged her to take up guitar and drums and to start singing professionally. This diverse background has produced a style and talent which is unique to this oriental beauty.

Bill, a master of unusual guitar effects, writes, arranges, and produces the duo's recordings. He has turned out five Bill and Sue-On Hillman albums as well as being actively involved in session work and production assignments with other Western Canada recording groups. Born and raised on a farm near Strathclair, Manitoba, he became involved with band and TV work while attending university. During this period he appeared on daily and weekly TV shows for five years, toured with Bobby Curtola, and appeared with such artists as The Everly Brothers, Roger Miller, Jimmy Gilmer and the Fireballs, and The Newbeats. He has written a wide variety of material including Cajun, oriental love songs, ballads, rock, C?W, MOR, folk and gospel songs. Bill is very active in all areas of show business and has one of Canada's largest tape and record collections of Old Radio Nostalgia from the '30s, '40s, and '50s (well over 10,000 shows).

The third member of The Western Union team is long-time friend and partner, Barry Forman of Rivers. Besides providing solid backing on electric bass and a variety of other instruments, he has delighted audiences with Cajun, Old Time, and Rock sounds on his famous blue electric fiddle.

The Western Union road show is further strengthened by keyboard whiz Kevin Pahl of Strathclair. Besides his musical contribution, Kevin -- a commercial pilot -- is responsible for flying the group to more distant engagements.

Bill and Sue-On, who hold University Degrees in Arts, Science and Education, both teach high school music, drama, and geography during the winter months. Between

teaching duties they have performed at just about every major function and showplace in Western Canada and the US. They are equally at ease in a concert situation, a teen or old time dance, convention or political rally, armed forces base, rodeo, or a TV or recording studio. Their variety of interests, their unique backgrounds, and their exposure to, and love for, all types of music, have resulted in an exciting style which has combined elements of country, rock, folk, pop, and oriental music. Their special brand of music is performed with an excitement which has never failed to capture the undivided attention of their audiences.

OFF TRACK AND BEHIND THE SCENES

Album No. 4 actually came out a short time after No. 5 but since it was mainly a compilation of all the Hillman solos from previous efforts we decided to give the higher number to the *14 Originals* album on which all songs were written by Bill. The design of No. 4 set the mold for the look of most of our future albums. We put an airbrushed black border around four studio photos, used the logo of our newly-formed record/production company, and displayed many candid photos in a filmstrip along the side of the back cover liner notes and credits.

LIFE IN THE STRIP

Starting with Album Volume 4, most of our albums featured a filmstrip which served as a sort of time capsule to capture some of our activities and interests at that particular place in time.

Frame 1: We used the top frame of this debut strip to unveil our new record company logo and name: Maple Grove Records. Maple Grove has been the name of our family farm since my great-grandfather first homesteaded it back in 1878. The logo features a Canadian maple leaf set in a concentrically grooved disc which represents a record.

Frame 2: This frame is an oblique aerial photo of Maple Grove. It is actually a photo I took of the framed painted-photo taken in the mid-'50s, which is still displayed in our home. After Sue-On and I moved into the house we worked for 25 years at making it our dream home -- doing most of the work ourselves. We cocooned the original brick structure with modern additions on four sides: a 50-foot solarium with waterfall, a two-storey, cedar-lined front room with cathedral ceiling and spiral staircase, an oak panelled den and library with adjoining bathroom and garage, and a media room with spiral staircase leading to a master bedroom with walk-in closets and a stacks area for storage of our magazine and comics collections. We converted the basement into a games room and practise recording studio.

Frame 3: Bill working at the 16-track mixing board of the new Century 21 studio.

Frame 4: Sue-On playing drums on one of our many CKX-TV shows. She is wearing one of the many imported East Indian velvet, embroidered tops that we often wore on stage in the late '60s through early '70s.

Frame 5: A shot of Sue-On and the Western Union on an evening grandstand stage during our 1974 tour of NW USA county and state fairs and rodeos: Sue-On drums, Bill guitar, and Barry Forman bass and fiddle. We were the featured act on the Bardine Productions variety grandstand circuit. Other performers included country singers Jeannie C. Riley, Charlie Louvin and Hee-Haw's Archie Campbell as well as many international variety/ vaudeville acts. We revelled in the backstage stories of the Opry,

escapades of early country stars, Bob Hope military tours, Ed Sullivan performances, Marx Brothers and experiences in the last days of vaudeville, Vegas, etc.

Frame 6: Sue-On overlooking the Century 21 board during one of our mixing sessions.

Frame 7: Bill and Sue-On in front of the television cameras on a television set.

Frame 8: A Bill and Sue-On photo taken at Maple Grove and first used on Album No. 3

Frame 9: Barry, Sue-On and Bill relaxing behind the cameras during a television taping.

Frame 10: Bill, Barry and Sue-On on the Federal Grain Train outdoor portable stage during a summer tour of Western Canada Exhibitions. Russ Gurr is shown sitting beside Sue-On with Jake Kroeger and Kerry Morris standing on the stage behind.

Frame 11: A symbolic roadsign pose taken outside Sue-On's Canadian hometown, Newdale. The sign reads: Strathclair (Bill's hometown) and Rivers (Barry's hometown). We had originally planned to use this as a cover shot but the colours and focus didn't turn out right.

The candid photos on the back cover give some indication of what a busy year 1974 had been. After many summer tours with [Russ Gurr's Federal Grain Train](#) show, followed by a year of exhibition shows for Treflan Chemicals, we were invited by Bardine Productions of the USA to audition for the NW USA Grandstand circuit. We did well, beating out many Nashville acts and the Bardines took over management of our American appearances. Through them we also obtained William Morris Agency representation. We immediately told the Bardines that we planned to increase the size of the band to come up with a bigger show, but they returned with a flurry of personal letters insisting that the act stay as a trio. Among the reasons they cited was the problem of obtaining work visas and clearances with the American Musician Union, as well as the danger of bringing in a different act than that seen by the Fair Boards who had booked us. We had to prove to the Unions that we were offering an act that was totally unique and different from anything American bands could offer. A singing Chinese girl drummer and recording / television performer seemed to fit the bill and we got our visas.

Cindy and Charlie Bardine were show business veterans who had worked the closing days of vaudeville and who had been immersed in all facets of show business throughout the 20th Century. They took us under their wing and offered invaluable show biz advice. Everything from stage entrances/exits and how to milk applause and encores, to costumes, and to surviving on the road as a family unit . . . and how to depend on and look to your mate for support and friendship in the crazy and often stressful and lonely life "on the road."

Album No. 4 was a way of collecting all of our songs - 18 titles - from the previous albums (we did not include any songs from album no. 1), all tied up in a nice promotional package. 1974/1975 presented us with a major career decision: go on the road full time and put everything into a music career . . . or stick with our secure roots in Maple Grove and continue on with careers as high school teachers and weekend / summertime musicians.

I retired from 30 years of high school teaching -- in the same school -- in 1997, to move on to work as a professor at the Faculty of Education in Brandon University.



[ALBUM 5:](#) Credits ~ Photos ~ Anecdotes ~ Lyrics ~ Reviews ~ MP3 Files
www.hillmanweb.com/albums/album05.html

RUNAWAY SLAVES ~ PRAIRIE DANCE HALLS ~ CHINA DOLLS ~ CAJUN FIDDLES ~ WAYWARD WOMEN & RESTLESS RIVERS ~ BAR ROOM LOSERS ~ MONTANA TOURS ~ WANDERLUST ~ ORIENTAL LAMENTS ~ WISTFUL LOVE BALLADS ~ ALLIGATOR POACHERS & MOONSHINERS ~ GOSPEL SONGS ~ MANITOBA BOYHOOD MEMORIES THESE RAMBLINGS FROM THE MIND OF BILL HILLMAN HAVE INSPIRED THE SONGS WITHIN

RECORDING ANECDOTES

We had written four songs for Album No. 3 which we released on a jacketed EP. The reviews from trade papers and radio stations were encouraging enough that I kept at it. We did four more originals for another EP which got good play on CBC radio. In fact, my Grandmother Jane Hillman, who lived in Elrose, Saskatchewan, was quite surprised, and I guess a little proud, to hear us on CBK Regina. By now we had eight originals to which we soon added six more to release as an all-original album. This album differed considerably from our previous efforts in that we used no sidemen -- Sue-On, Barry and myself did all the instruments, with a little help on keyboards from Kevin Pahl who was about to replace Barry in the group.

I lived and breathed this album for many months and was involved in all stages of its development: words and music to all songs, arrangements, production, all guitars, half the lead vocals, back-up and harmony vocals, photography, album design, pressing and mastering decisions, promotion, etc. Whew!... got that outa my system. From this album on, Sue-On and I were fully involved in all our albums -- mainly because in those early days of Independent record production there really wasn't anyone to turn to who could offer much in the way of professional advice, so we had to learn as we went along.

This album marked the session debut of Sue-On on drums and as a songwriter. She adapted a Mandarin Chinese poem to an oriental-sounding melody I had written. Sue-On came to Canada when she was 10, and although she speaks fluent Cantonese, she left her Hong Kong schooling before she had mastered the intricacies of Chinese writing. We asked her dad, Soo Choy, to write out the Chinese characters in the brush strokes that appear on the back cover of the album.

I had known Kevin Pahl since he was a kid. His dad, Howard, was the Strathclair Pool Elevator grain buyer, who also flew and sold aircraft as a sideline, while his mom Oretta operated an insurance office in Strathclair. Howard had even been my summertime employer back in my high school and college days. He contracted painting jobs around the area and hired me to use his paint spraying unit to paint barns, elevators, houses,

etc. Son Kevin, inherited his dad's love of flying and eventually became a flying instructor and crop duster. Howard is still flying and is one of the chief pilots flying [Harvards and other vintage WWII aircraft](#) out of Brandon's [Commonwealth Air Training Plan Museum](#).

Kevin showed a remarkable singing and piano talent at a very early age. By the time he reached my grade 9 class at Strathclair Collegiate, we started to work him into the band as a stand-in for times when Barry couldn't make gigs. The first date he played with us was at the Air Force Base at CFB Portage La Prairie. We did a panic all-day rehearsal at Maple Grove and then drove 130 miles to set up at the Junior Ranks Club. Kevin always looked young for his age and I remember that the audience were quite impressed with this "kid's" performance on Sue-On's Hohner Pianet. It was natural then, that as he became more familiar with stage work and our material, that we would call on him to join in the rehearsal of some of our soon-to-be recorded originals.

An uncredited musician on this session was another young Strathclair musician -- and future band member -- drummer Kerry Morris who dropped by the studio. He helped Sue-On out by adding the crash cymbal to *Cajun Child*. Not to be outdone, I did the percussion work on *Glory Land* -- the main backbeat came from my slapping a [Fender Malibu guitar](#) case. It's been held together by duct tape ever since.

Most of the photos on the album cover were taken in the new music and games room in our Maple Grove basement. We sat on a full-size snooker table -- a big antique oak effort with thick heavy slates that Sue-On and I had disassembled and dragged down the stairs in pieces. The background is one of our shake-covered walls while the splash of white in front of us is actually the furry back of our Great Pyrenees dog, Mya I. We had brought Mya back with us from our Montana tour the summer before.

The finished albums arrived from Toronto the same day we left for Nashville on one of our summer holiday driving marathons. We had been on Nashville's music row before but we had never had a product to flog. This time we got into all the studio and publishing offices on the row: Chet Atkin's office at RCA, Columbia, Tree, Billy Crash Craddock, Pete Drake, etc. Most were very polite and listened to cuts from the album and many of them showed off their own latest, soon-to-be released records. There were nibbles, words of advice, apologies, address exchanges, etc. Most companies showed some interest -- Chet liked our duet harmonies -- but the concept of a Chinese girl singer and her redhaired husband from Canada obviously didn't fit into the formula of Nashville and America's Southland.

One company, which boasted a fairly eclectic roster of artists, including Rosemary Clooney, showed quite a bit of excitement -- we even carried on telephone conversations after we returned to Canada.-- but nothing seemed promising enough to lure us away from the security of our teaching careers in Canada. The whole experience of knocking on the doors of these houses-converted-to-music-biz offices, exploring the Nashville streets, seeing the stars of the Grand Ole Opry in the old Ryman Auditorium, having drinks at Tootsie's Bar, squeezing into the Ernest Tubbs Record Shop for the after-Opry broadcast, going through the Country Music Hall of Fame, and seeing the many other Music City sites was a bit of a dream come true. Sue-On was a bit of novelty in the South... many people assumed that I was a Viet Nam vet and she was a bride I had brought back from Nam, and they proceeded to tell their own stories about their sons' involvement in the Asian war.

Many of the music execs suggested that the album wasn't country enough for the Nashville market. We never guessed that in a year we would be taking the same album

around to studios, publishers and promoters in London, England where we would be told that the album was a little *too* country for their market.

[UP TO NAVIGATION GUIDE](#)



[ALBUM 6: Credits ~ Photos ~ Anecdotes ~ Lyrics ~ Reviews ~ MP3 Files](#)
www.hillmanweb.com/albums/album06.html

BEHIND THE COVERS

This album was a transitional and trans-Atlantic venture - hence the name *Prairie to Soho* on side one. Some of the songs were written while Barry Forman was still with the group. As a result much of the material was written to feature his fiddle. The songs from the first sessions were recorded at Winnipeg's Century 21 Studios and to these we added four songs recorded in London's Gooseberry Studios at the end of our first tour of England. On this tour Sue-On and I were joined by bandmate, Kevin Pahl on keys and our longtime friend, Alan Jones, who had made the first contact with the UK agents who hired us for the tour. Alan joined us on organ in the clubs which had a Hammond on stage.

Front Cover: We posed for these photos wearing the patched chamois leather outfits we bought in London and had worn for much of our tour of clubs in the North East. We had recently imported grass-thatch wallpaper from Asia to cover our dining room walls and it was a remnant from this on which we pasted our photos -- laid out in the shape of an "H", and framed with stray pieces of bamboo-like grass. The centre photo featured our new Ovation acoustic guitar. Sue-On created the Indian-style beaded jewelry that we both wore.

Back Cover: Since we had written all of the songs on the album, we displayed the lyrics on the cover. The *Hillman Express* locomotive logo is an old woodcut we had come across. Again we used a filmstrip to feature some of our recent candid shots. The railway caboose and handcar photos were taken at Minnedosa's riverside park. The strip also features promo shots with outgoing band member, Barry Forman and incoming member, Kevin Pahl. There are two shots taken on the Thames at London - Westminster and London Bridges - with Tower Bridge and the Tower of London in the background. Our Great Pyrenees dog, Mya, had just presented us with a litter of 12 puppies, so of course, Sue-On had to get one of the pups into the act. She is holding her favourite, Beau, who soon after was bitten to death by a some sort of marauding carnivore that invaded our grounds. The shot of the two of us by the Yamaha grand piano was taken in our new basement studio.

TRANSITIONS

The First 5 Albums	Album 6
Songs were written with Fender Malibu acoustic guitar, wherever I could track down the always-busy Sue-On to act as a sounding board: kitchen, backstage, van, on the road, bedroom, garden, etc.	Many songs written on our new Yamaha Grand Piano in our new music rehearsal and recording studio at Maple Grove and a few were even written while supervising high school study hall.
Eclectic mix of songs - covers and originals	All-original concept album of 15 songs: <i>Prairie to Soho</i> and autobiographical <i>Prairie Saga</i>
All songs recorded in Winnipeg studios. High-priced, state of the art design and equipment.	Four songs recorded in a London, England studio. Under the streets of Soho in converted coal cellar. Clients included Sex Pistols and Hot Chocolate. Later in Newcastle and Durham.
Canadian recording engineers: Colin Bennet formerly with RCMP Musical Ride troupe. John Hildebrand: Century 21 founder, Calgary Stampede production, etc.	Move to using British engineers. John Smith who had worked on Beatles White Album. Mark Lusardi of London's Gooseberry Studios.
Little reliance on session players - along with Larry Clark we did all instruments: Sue-On on drums, Barry on bass and fiddle, and Bill on rhythm and lead guitars.	Gradual move to more session people and reliance on Kevin's keyboards and session drums: Mark LaFrance, Gord Osland, Lloyd Ryan. Osland had been in LA the day before he worked with us, on a Burton Cummings session... but demanding producer replaced him with a favourite studio drummer Keltner.
Many songs emphasized Barry's fiddle and country feel.	More reliance on incoming member, Kevin Pahl and pop sounds as Barry was leaving the group to spend more time with family and business.
Fender Telecaster and Malibu acoustic main guitars	Move to new Fender Thinline Tele and Ovation Legend acoustic
All creative energies went into producing Hillman albums	Called on to write, play and produce for Alan Jones' Free Spirit sessions. We started to provide drums & guitars for two of Barry's solo fiddle albums. Work on soundtracks & commercials.
The night before we left on our first England tour we had played Fort Francis, Ontario - actually we had played across three provinces in three days before we flew to England. We then drove to Middlesbrough where we played that night.	We spent the last night of the tour in London. On the next night we were back in Manitoba where we played an outdoor dance in the rain and mud - on an Indian Reservation near Rosburn.

PART I: PRAIRIE SAGA

MASSACRE

Before moving on to work as professors at Brandon University, Sue-On and I taught high school geography and English for many years. One reason for the creation of *Massacre* was to show students how native Indian place names have enriched our North American landscape. In addition to serving as a tribute to those who came here generations before my ancestors, I felt that the writing and recording of a song using colourful Indian names was an excellent way to enhance my teaching. As you can hear in the lyrics, I tried to string together the fascinating names of Indian tribes in a lyrical and rhythmic way.

Coincidentally, nearly everyone playing on this session was some sort of teacher by profession. Besides Sue-On, Barry and myself who have all taught high school, there was Kevin Pahl - a flying instructor, Kerry Morris - a computer instructor - and Larry Clark - a former university prof.

We enjoy doing this song on stage - and I guess the performances which stand out most in our memory where the times we sang it in the back-to-nature setting of the *Boggy*

Creek Call of the Wild Country and Bluegrass Festival. We were quite involved in the event for many years, both as performers and organizers and it was quite a shock when it all came to an abrupt end following the sudden death of Lewis Kaselitz. Lewis, his wife Linda and their kids had emigrated to Canada from Tennessee with the dream of starting a southern-style music festival in Manitoba. Finding a suitably scenic area south of Swan River, near Boggy Creek, they cleared land and used some of the logs to build a lodge. Next, they levelled an airstrip and then went about realizing their dream of bringing in the best country and bluegrass acts on the continent. It was a real treat working with artists such as Doc and Merle Watson, the Whites, the Kendalls, John Anderson, Little Jimmie Dickens, the Family Brown, Kitty Wells, Wayne Rostadt, and many Grand Ole Opry stars, bluegrass bands and Canadian country artists. Each year saw an even more impressive roster. The dream died, however, when Lewis succumbed to a massive heart attack.

JOHN CAMPBELL - PIONEER

My great grandfather came west in 1878 with his family and possessions to homestead a tract of land south of the Little Saskatchewan River Bend settlement - near the present location of Strathclair. We still maintain a home on this homestead site. This song was written as a tribute to those early pioneers. Besides trying to express our love for this area where my ancestors sank roots so long ago, I was also trying to show how much I feel we owe to our heritage.

Any fiddle you hear on our songs has been done by our favourite fiddler - Barry Forman. Barry and I met in University and we have shared many a stage and travelled many a mile together. When Barry finally got around to recording some fiddle albums, Sue-On and I were honoured to be asked to play drums and guitars on his sessions. One of these albums featured his nine-year-old son Kent, who later went on to play violin in symphony orchestras all over the world. Barry doesn't play as much now - he devotes 25 hours a day to his family, aircraft, and car dealerships - but it's always a pleasure when he is able to find the time to join us on stage.

(NOTE: [Barry Forman](#) passed away in 2011)

MEMORY TAKE ME BACK

I was raised on a 3/4 section farm in South Western Manitoba -- NW 24-16-22 -- and most of my boyhood memories involve life on the farm and visits to the village of Strathclair, 1 1/2 miles north. *Memory Take Me Back* is a reflection of these nostalgic days. More recently I was asked by the Brandon University Geography Department to write a chapter for a textbook on Manitoba geography that would be published by the University of Manitoba as a university level textbook. My topic was to be centered on rural prairie settlements and I chose my hometown, Strathclair -- using the title *Strathclair: A Prairie Town with a Past, Present & Future* or *Evolution of the Strathclair District*. Previously, as part of a Masters Degree project, I had transcribed the journals ('20s-'60s) of my maternal grandmother, Katie Campbell and these first-hand accounts were a great resource for instilling a bit of human warmth into what started as a more academic project. I also turned to *Memory Take Me Back* for inspiration and the following excerpt is really just an expanded version of the song:

The glory years of Strathclair and many other similar prairie communities reached their zenith in mid-twentieth century -- the '50s decade. The excitement and spirit generated by these towns was perhaps best epitomized by the Saturday Night "event." Following the Saturday evening supper hour, families would prepare to "go to town." The first cars to arrive would get the best seats. This meant finding a diagonal parking spot along the north side of main street (North Railway Street) in the well-lit, high-traffic area

extending from the pool room at Minnedosa Street to the modern 'self-serve' department store at Campbell Street (Figure 3) '50s Town Map.

Between these termini, people of all ages walked a jostling gauntlet along a strip of thriving businesses. Three favourite spots were the drugstore with its soda fountain and magazine rack, the Chinese cafe, with its booths for socializing, and a rival eatery which featured a jukebox, pinball machine and lunch counter with stools. Many of the men gathered in one of the two male bastions -- the beer parlour and the pool room; while a favourite routine for the women was to peruse the line of parked Fords, Chevies and Dodges -- each vehicle demanding a nod, wave or a detour off the sidewalk for a chat.

When the week's discussion lagged out on the street, there seemed to be no end of open doors to shops to provide diversion: bakery, grocery, dry goods store, newspaper office, garages, butcher shop, hardware store, restroom, shoemaker, and tinsmith. In the winter there was always skating, curling and hockey at the rink.

The routine for some was to go to the 7 o'clock movie at the Bend Theatre, delaying the sidewalk promenade for later. From a thirty-five cent allowance, kids could eke out a full night's entertainment which included a movie (complete with newsreel, Three Stooges short, cartoon, serial, previews, and draws for prizes), popcorn, "coke" or popsicle, double bubble gum, jawbreakers, and a fifty-two page comic book.

Later in the decade, many people gathered outside the electric shop which provided an outdoor speaker connected to the twenty-one inch television in the window, few realizing that this box with its flickering black and white pictures was a harbinger of drastic change to this weekly social phenonemon that everyone took for granted.

HARVEST

The lyrics pretty well tell the whole story of this song. We were trying to create, on record, a bitter-sweet feel akin to the moods of Autumn. If we succeeded in this I believe we owe it to Sue-On's wistful interpretation and also to the piano effects achieved by Kevin Pahl. Kevin joined us while he was in my grade 9 class at Strathclair Collegiate. We were amazed at his singing and playing abilities, even at that early age. Later, he also excelled in a flying career. At one time he was working part time in his family businesses, giving flying lessons at the Brandon Airport in afternoons, playing one-nighters with us, and crop dusting in the early mornings and evenings. Many times we would arrive back home around sunrise and shake him awake so he could make his way to his plane to work at spraying a grain field all morning.

CHINA LADY

Here's another one from our concept album, *Prairie Saga*. We assembled our regular Canadian cast of characters to record this one at Century 21 Studios - a very up-to-date facility housed in a converted synagogue in Winnipeg's North End. This entourage was made up of musician friends we have worked with for many years: Alan Jones - Blinded as a child in wartime England physiotherapist, songwriter - trying to get some kind of an oriental sound out of the massive Yamaha studio organ . . . Kevin Pahl - daredevil cropduster and musician extraordinaire - striving to get a vibes/celeste-like sound out of the Fender Rhodes . . . Barry Forman - fiddler, car dealer and former teacher - thumping away on bass . . . Sue-On and I were singing while playing drums and guitar. Meanwhile, engineer John Smith - who had worked with the Beatles at Abbey Road and had received a credit on their double White Album - tried to pull it all together in the control room. Also sitting in at the console for this session was another musician friend - Kerry Morris - pilot, hang glider, computer systems analyst - who joined us a few years

later as our regular bassist and drummer.

China Lady may not have much to do with traditional Chinese music but we had a lot of fun with it. Normally our relationship with oriental culture is much more serious. We have a deep respect for oriental art, music, traditions and martial arts. Our living, recreation, and work areas are all adorned with Chinese art and furnishings, of which the Chinese moon door on the cover of the CD is a good example. This appreciation of 'the East' has carried over into other areas as well. As a family sport and discipline we study Wado Kai Karate - a style developed by Supreme Instructor Masaru Shintani, 8th Dan - and under the instruction of Sensei Bruce Dunning, we have both achieved the rank of 1st Degree Black Belt.

My wife and soul mate, Sue-On, and my appreciation of her heritage has been the most profound influence on my life and creativity.

She was two years old when her mother pressed her into the arms of a fleeing neighbour woman who had wrangled a pass to Hong Kong. With her mother detained by the newly-empowered Communist Government in Canton, and her father in the far-away land of the gold mountain, the world suddenly became a terrifying and lonely place to this toddler. Even after her mother managed to join her in Hong Kong, it would be eight more confusing years until the family could be reunited in Canada.

It was an alien, hostile land which greeted the little girl and her mother after the days-long airplane journey: huge cars, bewildering mobs of "go bays" who all looked and sounded alike -- greasy, smelly foods -- miles of endless highways stretching across a flat and barren countryside of ice and snow... a cold and a wind which hurt her face, her ears, her hands and which, for some reason, tied her stomach into knots... and an endless trip across this land to another new home -- a house and restaurant in a place with an unpronounceable name: Newdale.

She had ranked above all the other girls in the Catholic School back in her warm Hong Kong, but here she found herself pushed in with little six-year-old girls... and boys -- everyone in the school stared, snickered, and talked that strange babble behind her back -- and no one could understand anything she tried to say or do.

For the next seven years every waking moment outside of school hours would be spent working in the restaurant -- The Paris Cafe (her grandfather had named it many years before). All the drama of her little world - family life, social life, homework, relaxation -- and her indoctrination into this "O so foreign" rural farm community -- would play against a backdrop of high wooden booths, counters and stools, magazine and grocery displays, and a "Specializing in Chinese and Canadian Dishes" kitchen.

The work was hard and long -- there was endless preparation of food, shelves to be stocked, orders to be served from 7 am to 11 PM, and a daily supply of water to be dragged from the town well.

She fell in love at 15 with a local musician and they married when she turned 18. She and her husband attended university and performed nightly in Brandon nightspots for enough years to garner five university degrees and to become high school teachers and later, university profs. She travelled and performed across two continents, bore three glorious children, and excelled in cooking, gardening, crafts, karate, music, motherhood, and as a person.

To this list of accomplishments she has added the role of restaurateur, as she and her husband owned and managed SOO'S -- a 265-seat restaurant in downtown Brandon for

10 years. Following the sale of the restaurant in 2002 she took a teaching position at Brandon University.

This little-smuggled-waif-turned-beautiful-woman is the most amazing person I have ever met. She is an inspiration and a source of wonder to all who have been touched by her aura.

I have been touched.

... I married her....

HIGHWAY 354

We have spent a lifetime juxtaposing our love of music and performing with our other day-job careers. For most of our lives we lived on the farm that was first homesteaded by my great grandfather. Wherever our travels took us, the journey always started on Highway 354 which runs north-south past our Maple Grove. This song was an attempt to show how this gravel road was really our gateway to whatever dreams (both real and beyond reach) and journeys (far and near) we pursued over the years.

HILLMAN EXPRESS

The covering title of this album of 15 original songs was the Hillman Express: Track 15. For this closing theme song to the Prairie Saga side, we just carried on with the train analogy: "Get on board, we'll make you more than satisfied. Whistle blowing, wheels a-rolling, come on and ride. Don't need no ticket, there ain't no wicket, there ain't no fee. Our magic potion is locomotion and ridin's free. Ride, Ride, Ride, on through the night. Rolling on outa sight. Rockin' Express speedin' through the west. Ride, Ride, Ride, on the Hillman Express. From prairie sidings to those exciting bright city lights. The music's hummin', as we keep runnin' on through the night. Don't need no baggage, we're gonna manage to get it on. To every station, 'cross the nation, come ride along."

PART II: PRAIRIE TO SOHO

CAJUN STOMP

Throughout our first decade of recording, I wrote many cajun-flavoured songs. One reason for this was to feature our bassist, Barry Forman, who was also a champion fiddler. Another reason, however, was that such tunes lent themselves to an exciting stage presentation in which we could feature Sue-On's driving backbeat on drums. All this was done about 10 years before this southern-style music really caught on - maybe we should have hung in there a little longer. The song did win some money for us though, in the American Song Festival contest out of California.

SHELTER

**(The first of four songs that came out of this Gooseberry Session:
Down, Down, Down ~ Walkin' Wreck ~ Farther Away)**

I have the good fortune to be able to write love songs for my wife - after which I can hear her sing them to me every night . . . nice work if you can get it. This was such a song, BUT the setting for the creation of the recorded version of this ballad could hardly be called romantic.

After finishing our first tour of 30 one-nighters in the Northeast of England, our English musician friend Mick Sandbrook drove us down to London which was experiencing the worst heat wave and drought of this century. What was normally lush greenery had been scorched brown and wilted and buildings which held a standing boast that they needed no air conditioning had become unbearably stagnant.

We picked *Gooseberry Recording Studios* from an advert in the British rock paper *Melody Maker*. The ensuing telephone conversation clinched the deal as they swore that their underground studio was always cool and their previous clientele included such clean-cut groups as the Sex Pistols. On the first day of the session we lugged our gear down to Bromley Station in Kent and boarded a train that took us to Charing Cross, London. We sweated across to Trafalgar Square where we hailed a cabbie who mistakenly drove us half-way across London because he couldn't cut through our 'Canajun' accents.

Eventually, we found the Soho studio... it was an underground studio - literally and figuratively. In stunned amazement we dragged our equipment through a sidewalk manhole and down a ladder into a dark, damp... but cool... converted cellar and coal bin. The advertised 16-track recording console had only 13 working tracks and most of these were usable only with the help of chewing gum, rubber bands and constant spraying and banging. I squeezed into a tiny closet with my acoustic guitar and a studio mic to isolate my playing from the sounds that our keyboardists Kevin Pahl and Alan Jones were able to eke out of the beat-up piano. The session drummer and bassist were good - in fact, I have since seen their names on many movie and concert credits out of England - but our session was constantly interrupted as they had to climb up the manhole ladder to confer with other clients.

We closed the session at 10 PM because we had to run through the streets to Charing Cross to catch the last train home to Bromley. Our engineer suggested that we might want to stay underground a little longer because there had been Tong wars and Chinese unrest on the streets above all evening. I called the song *Shelter* - we needed it. [Hear the whole story in the song, *Reelin' In Soho* on Hillman Album No. 7.](#)

FARTHER AWAY

I wrote this one under pressure. One of the sponsors for our first [tour of England](#) was the Traynor Sound Equipment Company of Toronto, who were trying to promote their sound equipment in England. Upon our arrival at Heathrow Airport we were directed to pick up the gear at a music shop in Bromley, Kent. Here we found a grand old house near the station which offered overnight bed and breakfast lodging. We were so fond of these digs that, after our six week tour in the North, we returned to this B&B for RandR.

Since we could commute easily to London by train, I impulsively booked studio time in Soho . . . the only problem was a lack of material to record. Shortly before we left Canada we had recorded enough original songs for Album 6 and all I had left were scraps of unpolished song ideas in my head. Our room opened onto a gorgeous English garden where I immediately started to bounce song ideas off Sue-On. After we came up with something akin to music, the four of us - Kevin, Alan, Sue-On and myself - threw together some hurried arrangements which we hoped would cut down on studio time. We eventually recorded four of my songs and one of Al's at the session.

WALKIN' WRECK (Gooseberry Session)

DOWN DOWN DOWN (Gooseberry Session)

OLD JED CLARK

This goofy, cornball track is meant to be just that. I had Barry play the old fiddle tune,

Old Joe Clark, and wrote a comedy thing around it. Horribly repetitious rhymes. . . well, maybe not any more contrived than some of the stuff that passes for "poetry" in rap or black street chant stuff. The singer is in love with a moonshiner's daughter and the old hillbilly pappa will have nothing to do with this young buck courting his pretty, young daughter. He sets the hounds on him and shoots a hole through his brand new JB Stetson had as the would-be suitor is fleeing the hounds. I dragged out a sound effects record for the squirrel gun blast and some of the hounds' barks, although I did most of the hounds myself.

STRANGER PLEASE

There's really not much I remember about this one, other than we had just pushed and pulled - shoved and slid - huffed and puffed a Yamaha Grand down into the basement location of our Maple Grove Studio. My first exposure to music came from listening to my mom and dad having jam sessions around the Heinzman - the thrill of hearing, and later making this homemade live music has never left me. Not surprisingly then, I was glued to this new toy for days and *Stranger Please* is one of the songs that came out of my internment.

Because our recording career goes all the way back to 1970, I would like nothing better than to go into a 21st century digital studio, complete with banks of synthesizers and improved production techniques to re-record songs such as this one.

SATISFIED

I wrote this gospel effort while playing our Fender Rhodes electric piano. I bought this to add a bit of sound variety to our trio. For a while I'd swing the guitar behind my back and switch to the Rhodes for many of our songs. When Kevin joined us he took over the Rhodes. Then, when Kerry Morris joined the band Sue-On moved to the keys for half of our shows. I had split the keyboard of the Rhodes 88 so that the left hand could be played through a bass amp. Kerry plays drums and bass guitar so he and Sue-On shared the drum duties. Kevin played the Rhodes on Satisfied. . . and I played my Fender Tele in rather funky style. I had lowered the strings close to the fingerboard and plucked with a heavy pick and fingers. I also did the bass vocal backgrounds while Sue-On did regular harmony and drums. We spliced the three different tempo sections together in the studio mix.

[UP TO NAVIGATION GUIDE](#)



BILL AND SUE-ON HILLMAN
RECORD ALBUM Volume 7
I. SUE-ON: The Newcastle Sessions
II. ROAD SONGS: On Tour In England
Recorded On Tour In England
Maple Grove Records MGS 1007

[ALBUM 7: Credits ~ Photos ~ Anecdotes ~ Lyrics ~ Reviews ~ MP3 Files](#)
www.hillmanweb.com/albums/album07.html

RECORDING ANECDOTES

Near the end of our first tour of England we developed friendships with a number of other musicians represented by our agent, Borrow-Hunter Agencies of Middlesbrough. Bass player, Mick Sandbrook generously offered to drive us, along with all our equipment, down to London. Traynor amps of Canada had supplied us with most of our gear and it had to be returned to Wing Music in Bromley, Kent. On our return to Canada we immediately started planning a second tour of England for the following summer. Throughout the coming year we kept up correspondence with Mick and he lined up session musicians and studio time at Impulse Studios ~ Walls End, Newcastle-On-Tyne.

As we had done on Album No. 6, we planned No. 7 to be a double concept package: Side One: *Sue-On - The Newcastle Sessions* which featured some of Sue-On's favourite solos and Side Two: *Road Songs: On Tour In England* for which I wrote songs inspired by our experiences on the road, both in North America and in England.

Side One: As with most of our albums we chose a number of cover versions of songs that would appeal to our record-buying fan base who always look for familiar titles. This allowed us to mix in an equal number of originals. We had done a less than spectacular version of *Tiny Bubbles* on our first album. Since that time we had combined it with *Paper Roses* in our stage shows. Sue-On was anxious to hear how this medley would sound from a more acceptable studio. We had a ball doing this one in a shuffle rhythm and then used the synth to add some "bubble" sound effects to it. She also did new version of *Silver Threads & Golden Needles*. It turned out to be a much more driving version than the previous album No. 1 effort.

Another fan favourite at our shows and dances has been *Please, Release Me*. For this one I set the rhythm by using a drumstick to beat out a percussive sound from my guitar. We have a number of Neil Diamond songs in our repertoire and we finally settled on his *Song Sung Blue*. When we contacted Neil Diamond to pay royalties for the release of his composition he requested that we send album covers/inserts. They were to be added to the display of covers on the walls of his Nashville office.

We sing the gospel great, *Why Me, Lord?* as a duet on stage. For the studio session, however, Sue-On sang a fantastic solo and overdubbed harmony parts, a la Mary Ford and Patti Page. Impulse owner Dave Wood was at the studio while we recorded *Why Me Lord?* and was so impressed with it that he immediately took a dub down to the local radio station. One of the jocks flipped over it and played it three times on his show. They later featured the song as a regular on their Sunday religious programmes, as well. We were pleasantly surprised when *Why Me, Lord?* went on to receive a nice bit of airplay across the UK and Germany.

Side Two featured seven more originals - two of them written by Al Jones, who had organized and accompanied us on our first UK tour. Sue-On had recorded the ballad, *While You're Away*, the year before in London's Gooseberry Studios. *Boogie Woogie Band* had come out of the Free Spirit sessions we had done the year before.

Outlaw Ramblin' Band narrates the events of the first tour: the rather scary decision to leave the Canadian prairies to embark on a 30-night tour of English clubs, our first flight in a 747, the hectic confusion of Heathrow Airport, the crazy London traffic, the long commute to Northern England in a packed Commer van, and the challenge of playing for packed Workingman Clubs every night. This involved adapting to taking the stage after a warm-up variety act and house band intro, playing a show set, getting off stage while the audience indulged in Housie (Bingo), and then going on for a dance set,

and shutting the whole thing down by 11 o'clock. It also gave us the experience of working with musicians we had heard about and admired for so long, exploring dressing rooms that the Beatles had used a few years before, playing up the novelty of our "American" accents and country-rock style music, being typical tourists through the day, and suddenly adapting to Canada again after being immersed in British culture for almost seven weeks.

One Night Stand is a sort of wistful reflection on our many years of performing one-night shows for just about every venue imaginable. This duet opened many doors for us as it became a Top Ten hit on many stations and we performed it on network television, the national Big Country Awards Show, the Opry North Show and shows in various Concert Halls. It was also instrumental in our receiving the Manitoba Entertainers of the Year Award, which led to media coverage on the CBC National, newspapers, magazines and TV/Radio interviews.

Swamp Romp is a bit of a screamer, but its main theme is that we were open to all musical genres and gigs. Over the years we have performed just about every type of music for all kinds of functions: military bases, TV/Radio, fairs and rodeos, outdoor festivals, arena shows and dances, auditoriums, penitentiaries, barn dances, high school proms, hoedowns, film soundtracks, commercials, churches, weddings, socials, Indian pow-wows, and festivals: folk, Celtic, blues, cowboy poetry, gospel rock, bluegrass, etc. ... we love 'em all.

Montana shares the experiences we had while performing on grandstand shows in US state and county fairs. All of our tours have been summer tours, taken during our summer break from teaching high school -- and university courses in our more recent years. Our backgrounds as geography majors and educators always influenced our appreciation of the geography and local colour of the places we toured. This fascination is quite evident in this song.

Good Time Jamboree is a novelty song about our stage exploits and the experience of performing many decades worth of one-nighters. It was recorded during our Newcastle sessions in England. This studio, like so many of the places we played in England, was inaccessible in the extreme. We had to pull our gear up many flights of stairs and through a seemingly endless number of doors because the facility was situated on the upper level of a large bingo hall complex. After surviving this ordeal which anyone in his right mind would have left to roadies, I returned to re-park our Ford Transit van only to find that the meter maid had decorated it with a parking ticket - to add infuriation to fatigue.

Impulse Studios were located above a bingo hall in Wall's End, Newcastle. The studio is pretty well known since many popular groups have recored there: Lindisfarne, members of the Chieftains, Sting, etc. Our bass-playing friend, Mick Sandbrook, had lined up musicians for the session and we were quite excited about working with a synth player for the first time. In 1977, synth players were still a bit of a rarity - the instruments were costly, not too versatile, and somewhat hard to master as preset sounds were not yet common. John Ashcroft's work on the Arp Odyssey Synth and his "string machine" really fattened and sweetened our sound. We spent much of our time on the session trying to convey to him the arrangements and sound effects we heard in our heads, but had no way of writing out. I was so busy eking synth arrangement I ran out of time, which resulted in not adding all the lead guitar parts I'd planned.

As usual we put in long hours and did the entire album in two days. We did the final mix far into the night, a job Sue-On has little interest in, so luckily our friends Keith and

Margaret Jones from Spennymoor showed up and offered to take Sue-On to a gambling casino. She did quite well in her gambling debut and even won about 30 pounds. Keith is Alan Jones' brother and we've since enjoyed many get-togethers with them on both sides of the Atlantic.

Since the album cover was designed to be a "reversible," double concept project with both sides serving as "front covers," we inserted a lyrics, credits and photo sheet. After pressing Brandon photographer Terrence Fowler for something unusual, he came up with a seldom used prism lens which produced a multi-imaged Sue-On for her solo cover. For the *Road Songs* side, he came up with another special lens for which the three of us wore our London patched chamois/buckskin gear as we posed in front of a white fur rug we had borrowed from our Maple Grove fireplace.

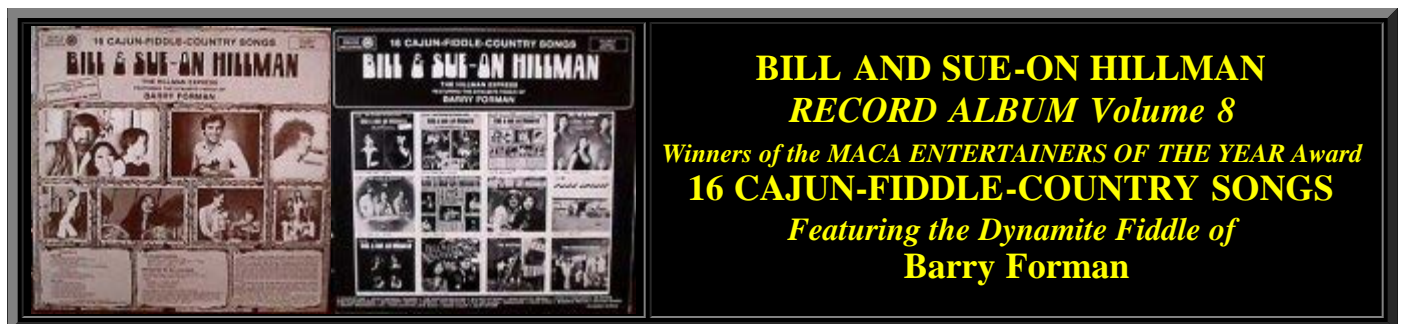
The by-now-trademark filmstrip that we put on the album cover insert sheet included some recent candid photos. We recycled some of our previous studio shots including the back-to-back picture that we had used on the cover of Album No. 6 and for promo 8"x10"s. Two other photos are with Mick Sandbrook and some of our English musician friends.

During an open-house visit to the famed Pinewood Movie Studios we visited the main soundstage where they had just wound up a James Bond shoot and were bringing in truckloads of white styrofoam to create a North Pole set for the upcoming Superman movie. I stood under the studio's Superman sign, pulled open my shirt to reveal my maple leaf T-shirt and assumed a heroic Captain Canuck pose. My hopes of being signed as a stand-in for Christopher Reeve never materialized :) This gigantic studio burned down soon after - but was rebuilt - even bigger and better.

Two London photos have me aiming a cannon at the Tower Bridge and Sue-On welcoming pedestrians on London Bridge. The last photo is of Sue-On seated during a break at an outdoor street dance back home on Main Street, Strathclair, Canada.

We had a great time prowling around the Pinewood backlot and finding many of the props used for the just-completed James Bond film, including the mock-up shell of his submarine Lotus. For the Bond film, *The Spy Who Loved Me*, a giant 007 soundstage was built to replicate the inside of a tanker, at the cost of \$1.8 million. Also impressive was the mammoth water tank that stored 4.5 million litres. Another highlight was touring the Avengers offices and locations where Patrick McNee and Diana Rigg had spent so much film time playing John Steed and Emma Peel.

[UP TO NAVIGATION GUIDE](#)



[ALBUM 8](#): Credits ~ Photos ~ Anecdotes ~ Lyrics ~ Reviews ~ MP3 Files
www.hillmanweb.com/albums/album08.html

LINER NOTES

The 16 Cajun-Fiddle-Country songs in this album are drawn from the decade-long recording career of Bill and Sue-On Hillman -- most are Bill Hillman compositions and feature the exciting fiddle of Barry Forman. Barry showcases the dynamite style which has won the Manitoba Fiddle Championships so many times. The inspiration for these songs comes from years of television, stage and radio work, tours of American county and state fairs, Canadian grandstand shows, three tours of Britain, and tours of Northern Canada, military bases, prairie dance halls, arenas, clubs and high schools.

This album is truly an international one, containing material recorded in studios in Newcastle, Durham and London, England as well as Winnipeg, Canada. Over the years, the group has become, in fact, Canadian ambassadors of sorts -- having performed with top-name artists all over Britain, America and Canada.

The band's stage show runs the gamut from ballads, folk and gospel, to country, pop and rock. But now, in response to the many requests for an album featuring exclusively Cajun, Fiddle and Country songs, we proudly present this outstanding collection.

**Barry Forman passed away in 2011.
The following is taken from the Tribute Webpages
that we dedicated to Barry's memory:**

Music played a major role in Barry's life. While still in Rivers High School he formed the popular Country Gentlemen band that became well-known through its many CKX Television shows, dances dates, Co-Op Neighbour Nights and a multitude of other live appearances across Western Manitoba.

This band, with longtime friends and bandmates Jake Kroeger and Bill and Sue-On Hillman, evolved into the Western Union. Barry went on to play bass and fiddle with the Hillmans on 10 record albums. Three of these albums were acclaimed solo fiddle albums, one of which featured nine-year-old son Kent.

Along with the Western Union, Barry spent many summers touring Western Canada as part of Russ Gurr's [Federal Grain Train Show](#). Following this they went on to play Exhibition Grandstand Shows in State Fairs and Rodeos across Northwestern USA. Barry and Kent were later chosen to represent Manitoba in a series of shows across the US and he worked closely with daughter Shauna in promoting her successful music career.

These Web pages have been compiled as an online career photo album documenting Barry's love of music and featuring many of the names and faces of musicians he played with over the years.

THE BARRY FORMAN MEMORIAL PAGES:
www.hillmanweb.com/forman

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BILL AND SUE-ON HILLMAN

Winners of the MACA ENTERTAINERS OF THE YEAR Award



[ALBUM 9: Credits ~ Photos ~ Anecdotes ~ Lyrics ~ Reviews ~ MP3 Files](http://www.hillmanweb.com/albums/album09.html)
www.hillmanweb.com/albums/album09.html

LINER NOTES

The selections on this album were recorded in Durham during the duo's third tour of England. Bill and Sue-On are backed on this, their ninth album, by DESPERADO, a top English show group which has been thrilling British audiences for years. This exciting package features the songs performed on stage during the Hillmans' overseas stage shows and includes seven original compositions -- five by Bill and two by DESPERADO.

In order to embark upon the full-time musical career of which this album marks the recording debut, the members of DESPERADO have had to give up very lucrative occupations including engineer, electrician, teacher, public servant, draftsman and scaffolder.

All the band members have about 15 years experience as semi-professional musicians, having worked with a long line of bands with a wide range of styles. These bands have featured a colourful array of names such as: *Inner Vision*, *Steve Brown Soul Set*, *Memphis*, *Tramline*, *Cycle*, *Candlelight Four*, and numerous *Paul Rodgers* groups before he moved on to *Free* and *Bad Company* fame.

The inspiration for the Hillman performances comes from years of television, stage and radio work, award shows, tours of American county and state fairs, Canadian grandstand shows, three tours of Great Britain, and tours of northern Canada, military bases, prairie dance halls, arenas, clubs and high schools. The act is truly an international one, having recorded in Newcastle, Durham and London, England as well as Winnipeg, Canada. In fact, over the years, the group has become Canadian ambassadors of sorts, having performed with top-name artists all over Britain, America and Canada.

The band's stage show runs the gamut from ballads, folk and gospel to country, pop and rock. So now . . . sit back for three-quarters of an hour and sample the unique and truly entertaining sound of *Bill and Sue-On Hillman* -- recent winners of the M.A.C.A. top ENTERTAINERS OF THE YEAR AWARD.

ACROSS THE TRACKS: SONG ANECDOTES

SAIL ON 747

This is a Rock-a-Billy flavoured song. My first exposure to rock 'n' roll was through the Memphis Sun Records artists: Elvis, Carl Perkins, Johnny Cash, Jerry Lee Lewis - The excitement generated by these early rockers has been a major musical influence.

The idea for the song came during a long wait at London's Heathrow Airport during a work-to-rule strike. Sue-On was pregnant with our first child, Ja-On, and we perhaps were a little nostalgic and homesick after having toured for seven weeks in a foreign land. It had been a very successful tour highlighted by the recording of five sides in a London studio, but we have always been 'homebodies,' - a defence, I guess, from the craziness of the road. It was approaching harvest time on the prairies and we were looking forward to experiencing our unique fall rituals and even seeing the stubble fires which light up the night skies on every horizon. We had loved the experience of this, our first tour of England - the Newcastle Brown Ale, the ocean, the history, the Geordies, football, housie, BBC, Blackpool... everything - but it was time for homefires.

The song was recorded three years later at Guardian Studios in northern England. This 24-track studio is set up in two adjacent row houses on High Street, in the tiny village of Pity Me, just outside the beautiful, historic City of Durham. The studio was a labour of love and brain child of owner/engineer Terry Gavaghan who saw it as a means of getting 'off the road' while still staying in the music industry. He invested the money he had saved touring as lead guitarist for the Carpenters - here in this quaint little Yorkshire village. This choice of locale was perhaps not as unusual as it might first appear as England's Northeast is saturated with clubs and musicians.

We later performed *Sail On* at the Manitoba Association of Country Artists (MACA) Awards ceremonies where we were backed by a large stage band complete with fully-charted arrangements - quite a contrast to the small combo approach we took on the record.

LADY LUCK

This effort was the culmination of a joint international project. We spent a week in Durham's Guardian Studios with Desperado, a Middlesbrough-based English show band. After pooling our efforts on the backing tracks, we each did our own version of the final vocals and mix. The result was that they had songs to release as singles and we had enough originals and covers for a complete album. I felt that we needed synth arrangements and since our regular keyboard player, Kevin Pahl, couldn't accompany us on this third tour, I hired one of the musicians whom we had met in the local clubs. He did a fantastic job for us and we really weren't too surprised when we learned five months later that he had joined Mark Knopler's Dire Straits as a regular.

Desperado was comprised of Alun Edwards (vocals, congas, percussion), Mick Sandbrook (vocals, bass), John Whittingham (vocals, guitar), Colon Bradley (vocals, guitar, keyboards), Paul Duckers (drums) - all from the Middlesbrough, County Cleveland area. Paul Rodgers of Bad Company had come out of this group a few years before.

It was while recording the vocal tracks for this song that we were drawn into the realm of the supernatural. The hour was late - around midnight at Guardian Studios, Pity Me - the bed tracks were in the can, and we had just removed the drums from the isolation cubicle which was to double as my vocal booth. Sue-On had gone across the street to make a telephone call while Terry, Alan and Mick sat staring at me through the control room glass, waiting for me to sing along with the backing tracks of Lady Luck. Part way into the song there was a brilliant flash of light around me and someone turned off the 24-track recorder.

Wondering what the problem was, I looked inquisitively toward the guys at the console. They had strange looks on their faces and I heard Terry's voice over the cans, directing me to come in. My first thought was that something had happened to destroy the master

tape. Terry phoned his neighbour friend while I tried to get Mick to tell me what had happened. The neighbour rushed in saying, "She's back!???"

All three in the control room had seen a brilliant light radiating from a negative image of a small person standing close to me. Terry explained that years ago a young girl who lived here in this row house, the one that he had converted into his studio, had run out into the path of a lorry and had been struck down. They carried her into this room and had laid her dying body on a sofa in the same area as the vocal booth.

The ghostly image of this girl has appeared frequently, usually in conjunction with some calamity - in this case her visit must have been brought about by my singing. Stories about the 'ghost' (Guardian Angel?) abound and her picture is displayed in the pub down the street. I suggested to Terry that he should include the story in his advertising, but he seemed very reluctant - in fact, he was afraid it would drive away business. I saw no ghost but I did see a brilliant light ... and the shocked and frightened looks on my cohorts' faces.

FREEDOM TRILOGY

We based this song on some old folk music themes. Previous to the recording session we had done the number as an acoustic-backed duet - usually at folk concerts or for small gatherings. Thanks to Alan Clark's synth arrangements and the temptation to do layered vocal overdubs, the finished recording differed considerably from our stage version.

REELIN' IN SOHO

Reelin' in Soho is an account of our first recording session in London, England. As suggested in the first verse, this was the culmination of a tour in which we - The Hillmans From Canada - had played 30 one-nighters in night clubs and discos across Northern England. Many nights found us in the ubiquitous Workingman Clubs where a house band opened at 7:00 pm, followed by opening acts which usually offered variety entertainment.

We would then come on for a show set, after which there would be a long break for housie (bingo) - a national addiction. After this exciting gambling break we would return for a dance set - but by 11:00 pm the dancers would call it a night since they had to work the next day. Being so used to the long drives, long gigs and late nights back in Canada, it was hard for us to wind down so suddenly and every night found us driving around looking for some place which might still be open - we met some very colourful characters on these midnight rambles.

The audiences attended these clubs every night of the week and had seen it all, so it was especially rewarding to 'go down a bomb'...to 'bomb' has a different connotation there than it does in North America. It was tremendously exciting to study the dressing room walls which were festooned with pictures, cards and stickers left by previous entertainers - even the Beatles, early in their careers, had toured this circuit. These backstage walls were seldom refurbished since it seemed that the more 'name' acts displayed, the more prestigious the club. Perhaps the most fascinating venues though, were the Country and Western Clubs where nearly everyone showed up in full Western regalia - including boots, hats, gunbelts... and western drawls - Geordie cowboys.

Our strangest and perhaps most memorable night occurred at Scarth - a village in Yorkshire. Throughout the tour, we spent most mornings and afternoons being tourists - traipsing through castles, cathedrals, and pubs and across highlands and moors. Scarth, however, offered a special reward because it is home to Alf Wight, *aka* James Herriot of

All Creatures Great and Small fame.

We visited his veterinary office and toured his small museum just down the street. Fittingly, the club we were to play was on the outskirts of town surrounded by a meadow or cow pasture. It was a 1920s pavilion-style hall.

Our opening act for the night arrived late - surrounded by an entourage of people in formal wear. He was a singer who had been married just a few hours before in Newcastle. This set the mood for the whole evening - the place seemed to explode and although the club should have been emptied by 11:00, the management barred the doors to keep out the local constabulary and the party continued into the wee hours.

When Sue-On wearied of the drums, a succession of people - our agent, the bartender and even the groom - took control of the sticks. Something right out of the fictional Darrowby.

HOLD ME DARLIN'

This ballad is just an old-fashioned country love song I wrote to show off Sue-On's gutsy emotional delivery. It came out of the Durham/Pity Me sessions with Desperado. Their drummer had some trouble with the country 3/4 rhythm so Sue-On moved into the drum booth to do the drums - nothing new for her as she has done drums on about half our records.

The curious thing about the studio drums is that they had been purchased in England from the estate of the late Keith Moon of The Who. The studio owner had been a buddy of Moon's and shared many stories of their antics around London. The studio piano also had some claim to fame, being the French upright used on Elton John's *Honky Chateau* album... Oh, the stories they could tell.

Hold Me Darlin' first appeared on Album 9 - On Stage in England. In answer to DJ response we later released it as a single.

BYE BYE JA JA

I wrote this one just near the tail end of the Disco phenomenon - in fact, the original title was Disco Stomp, but I have adopted the subtitle since the Disco fad mercifully has fallen from favour (even though live DJs with their dead music have survived and have greatly reduced the number of venues for live bands).

Since Sue-On and I had just backed Barry Forman on two fiddle albums and we had just finished an album of our own Cajun songs, it seemed natural to combine all these influences. The song has a "what if...?" premise - what if a John Travolta-type denizen of Regine's and Club 54 were transferred from the New York disco scene to a backwoods, bayou town in Louisiana?

While writing this I repeated the hook "Bye Bye" so often that it found its way into our toddler-son Ja-On's vocabulary. For months, the last words we heard as we left to play nightly gigs were "Bye Bye Da Da". His constant input on this one was such that I just had to use his name in christening the song's main character.

Curiously, despite the Cajun theme and all the Cajun-style music we have done, this song features no fiddle. We recorded it in Durham with the English show band, Desperado and there was a shortage of fiddlers in the area. However, later in this session we did attempt a 5-string banjo imitation on a synth for the Eagles song *Take It Easy* -

but that's another story.

BRING BACK THE GOOD TIMES

(Album No. 9 Out Take ~ Released later as a single)

This song has a complicated genealogy. We recorded the bed tracks with Alan Clark (later of Mark Knopfler's Dire Straits) and the writers, Desperado, during our third tour of England, but we did not have time to complete the vocals before we flew home.

Due to luggage restrictions, we left the two-inch masters in England so they had to be brought over a year later when bassist Mick Sandbrook and his wife Margaret visited us in Canada. We added vocal tracks in Winnipeg's Century 21 A-Studio, mixed it at the B-Studio, and sent it to Edmonton for a Dolby fix.

At this point we realized that the song was too long for single release, so we went into the editing studio with John Hildebrand to razor blade cut a verse and chorus out of the 1/4-inch master tape. John was a master at this, having done many similar edits on the K-Tel TV records.

The shortened version was mastered and pressed at Columbia Records in Toronto. The single received good airplay and the since the song has never appeared on our albums, we felt it would make a suitable finale for our first all-original CD and digital tape release.

[UP TO NAVIGATION GUIDE](#)



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HILLMAN CAREER TIMELINE INCLUDED IN THE CD INSERTS

2010... Bill celebrates his 50th year on stage with Sue-On and son Robin (bass and drums) as they play more packed arena dances for town Homecomings and Reunions including [Newdale](#) and [McCreary](#). Bill and Sue-On are featured in the [Shakin' All Over exhibit](#) in the Manitoba Museum of Man and

	Nature - Winnipeg. They are invited to perform on the Shakin' All Over stage.
21st Century 2000-2009	SOO'S is sold after Bill is recruited to teach as a Professor at Brandon University's Faculty of Education and Sue-On is offered a position with the BU English For Academic Purposes program. Performing continues with weekly jam sessions at Ken Daniel's Cantina, music projects with the Hillman kids, Sock Hop Reunion shows with Canadian rock 'n'n roll legend, Bobby Curtola , Blues Concerts , folk festivals, and a series arena dances. Bill plays many gigs with a Christian rock band and a Beatles tribute band. The Hillmans band takes on new life playing Manitoba Reunion and Homecoming Shows. The Hillmans are invited by Phil Collins and Disney to attend opening night ceremonies for Tarzan the Musical on Broadway , and in Holland and Hamburg . Bill arrives a week early in Hamburg to allow time to research the early days of the Beatles (Tracking the Beatles in Hamburg)
1990s	A multitude of entertainment-related projects including weekly performances in SOO'S Showhall in downtown Brandon. The musical legacy continues as the three Hillman offspring play a host of instruments: synthesizers, classical piano, harp, bagpipes, drums, saxophone, clarinet, trombone, guitar ~ and are immersed in all musical styles. Bill keeps adding to his vintage guitar collection .
1997	Release of Album #12 - CD III - Canada Sessions - The Early Years
1997	Bill's retirement from Strathclair Collegiate (1965-1997) to devote more time to music, writing & recording projects and his website design company .
1996	Launch of the Bill & Sue-On Hillman Eclectic Studio Website on the Internet: http://home.westman.wave.ca/~hillmans/ Later expanded to: www.hillmanweb.com
1996	Featured in a variety of local & network TV & radio shows- CBC's <i>Coleman & Company</i> , <i>Star Billing</i> , <i>CBC Network Radio</i> ...
1995	Release of CD #11 - On Tour in England - 26 Great Songs
1994	Regular performers in their newly expanded SOO'S 265-seat Restaurant & Showhall - with featured guests <i>Kerry Morris</i> , <i>Kevin Pahl</i> , <i>Barry Forman</i> , and many more...
1993	Release of 10th Album - 24 Of Our Best Original Songs on CD.
1992	The already-full agenda of family, music, teaching and karate activities augmented with the opening of SOO'S Restaurant - 222 on 10th and Princess in Brandon, Manitoba, Canada.
1992	Bill & Sue-On both earn Black Belts in <i>Wado Kai Karate</i> .
1991	Incorporation of many of the 50 published and recorded original songs into Bill's <i>Masters Degree</i> requirements.
1980-85	Featured performers and organizers for the Boggy Creek Call of the Wild Country Music & Bluegrass Festival .
1982	Command Performance for <i>HRH Princess Anne</i> .
1980s	Offspring William Ja-On Campbell, William Robin Lee-Chan Monroe and China-Li Jade Ma-Ri Introduced to the world of music.
1980	Featured on Canada's First Video Album (12 Hillman Videos) - <i>Opry North</i> appearances and a multitude of other performances on stage and TV/radio, spread over 3 decades - Numerous songwriter awards - Many <i>MACA Awards</i> nominations - National <i>CCMA Big Country Awards Ceremonies</i> performances.
1980s	Special Projects: TV and Radio commercials - Movie soundtracks - Barry Forman fiddle albums - Al Jones' Free Spirit album.
1980	Voted <i>Manitoba Entertainers of the Year</i> at the Annual <i>MACA Awards Ceremony</i> in Winnipeg
1979	Tour of England with top English show band <i>Desperado</i> . The Hillman / UK Connection
	Recording session at Guardian Studios - Durham, England Album No. 9 On Stage in England with

1979	<i>Alan Clark of Dire Straits</i> on keyboards.
1978	Release of Album No. 8 - 16 Cajun-Fiddle-Country Songs with featured guest artist <i>Barry Forman</i> .
1977	Tour of Northern England - Workingman's Clubs - Social Clubs - Discos - Beach Resorts - Country & Western Clubs
1977	Recording sessions at <i>Impulse Studios</i> - Newcastle, England Album no. 7 - On Tour In England released.
1976	Tour of England - 30 one-nighters - featured act : <i>The Hillmans from Canada</i> with Kevin Pahl & Alan Jones.
1976	Recording sessions at <i>Gooseberry Studios</i> - London, England Album No. 6 The Hillman Express Track 15 released.
1975	Fly-in Tour of remote northern Manitoba centers.
1974	Tour of Northwestern USA State and Country Fairs - Grandstand Show Headliners: Sue-On & the Western Union from Canada .
1974	Recording Sessions at Century 21 Studios, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada - Release of Album No. 5 - Fourteen Original Songs .
1967 - 1973	Summer Tours of Western Canada exhibitions and grandstands as the <i>Western Union</i> - Grandstand & Stage Shows with Russ Gurr & the Federal Grain Train - Treflan Exhibitions.
1970 - 1973	One album per year: Western Union I & II , Bill & Sue-On Hillman 3 & 4
1967	Featured on film footage shown every hour at Expo 67 -Montreal, Quebec, Canada ~ 10,950 showings
1966 Aug. 29	<i>Bill and Sue-On's Wedding Day - Start of the Odyssey</i> .
1960	Bill's first onstage performance with the Campbell/Christie family orchestra in hometowns of Strathclair and Newdale. Over the next few years he will play with a variety of bands: Country Gentlemen, Flamingo Combo, Shadows, Dovermen, etc.

[UP TO NAVIGATION GUIDE](#)

See and Hear All the Hillman Albums



ALBUM WALL HILLMAN ALBUM WALL CONTENTS

www.hillmanweb.com/albums

Album	Album	100 Songs	CD 10 Originals	CD 11 England Tours	CD 12 Early Years	Free	Forman	Forman
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