

July 5, 2010  
Carl Watanaby  
c/o KQEI, Public Radio  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Mr. Watanaby:

## PROLOGUE

Obviously I lost an opportunity to have an interview with you. Perhaps, I am a novice and am incompetent at the art of (shall we use the unfortunate word?) "promotion." No doubt, I have much to learn. But, at the same time may I gently suggest that, like many artists, I am not inclined to give out information over a stranger's answering machine about my private thoughts and personal secrets, regarding whatever it is that I personally may think I have to offer, in order to help make the world a better place. And isn't that why most of us are "here"? To help make the world a better place?

While it may seem that if one is not, in fact, willing to provide personal information over a stranger's answering machine, then, what makes one think that one would be willing to do the same in a radio interview, whereby, thousands of "perfect" strangers would hear about them?

But there is actually a difference in a radio interview: one could (and would) conceivably be able to fix any possible misunderstandings and could, therefore, speak up in one's defense, not unlike a man on public trial.

One of the reasons I wanted to sing "serious" music was to contribute a positive benefit to others--to offer people some relief who suffer from sadness and heartbreak, from fear and anger, from alienation and loneliness; who grieve from loss; who are infirmed from injury, disease, or advanced age.

And, yes, there is a powerful tendency for me to want to take these reasons and keep them close to my heart.

I just borrowed a line from The Holy Bible, in which it was said that God spoke to Mary, saying that she would bear a son--a very special child--and that she pondered those things and kept them close to her heart.

Mary had a secret; I, too, have a secret.

Epiphanies, at least in our culture, come under the category of being rather strange, at least when they are dramatic and life-changing; and they can seem

incredulous, not unlike the scenario of witnessing a cow jumping over the moon.

The story in The Holy Bible of Saul's awakening (or epiphany) while on the road to Damascus, permits us to be a little more forgiving, or accepting, of the phenomenon we call epiphanies.

My point is that one ought to be very discrete about leaking strange and unfamiliar information to "perfect" strangers, especially over their answering machines.

Artists have their reasons, certainly, for why they practice their art; their craft. Some of those reasons,

out of a personal need, may be kept secret. But that does not mean, necessarily, that what artists, in general, have to offer is trivial, insignificant, or even bad.

I personally have an important message in my art--in my CDs--to relate, or tell, to the world. The content, alone, the essential meaning, alone, may not be completely obvious, and, in fact, is not the same as subject matter, per se. It is more abstract than the subject itself. Content is something like the spirit of a song, painting, or sculpture.

For example, there may be a hundred ways to paint The Grand Tetons or to sing the old song, Amazing Grace, but each artist will put forth an interpretation of their respective subjects in a compositional idea, an aesthetic statement, and we can call that content. Therefore, it could be said that what the artist "brings" to the subject, interpretively, is content. I don't just sing: I interpret.

THE SONG: "...PHOENIX"

I need to tell you, now, that Mr. Jimmy Webb did not--I repeat: did not write, compose, or, in any way, author the song, By the Time I Get to Phoenix.

I DID.

If Mr. Jimmy Webb actually contributed anything, at all, he orchestrated the song and, to use that uncomfortable word, he "promoted" it. The biggest moment of the song's "promotion" was when he took it to Mr. Glen Campbell, who then made it into a hit.

I must add that the song was more than just a "hit." Recent ratings suggest that it is one of the greatest hits, ever.

But what Mr. Jimmy Webb did was make it actually possible for the song to "live." Otherwise, it might never have survived beyond my own lips, as I sat across a small, square table from an Ivy League-looking, middle-aged gentleman, while in the vicinity of San Francisco's Fisherman's Wharf.

But it must also be said that Mr. Jimmy Webb, who, for over 45 years has been given credit for writing a song that he never composed, has virtually no scruples; no conscience!

The least Mr. Jimmy Webb could have done would have been to claim the truth, to wit, that the song was composed by an anonymous source and that all he, Mr. Jimmy Webb, ever did was to orchestrate it, and, yes, "promote" it.

So by what means did Mr. Jimmy Webb come by that song? My song? My composition?

I'm guessing--it's a wild guess--that it was a gift to him from that middle-aged gentleman, whom I met near Fisherman's Wharf, who claimed to be a songwriter. Did he in fact, give that song to an aspiring, ambitious, apparently deserving, young man from Oklahoma, attempting to make a "go" at songwriting?

Indeed, it might have, also, been a way to not only help some kid out who looked deserving, but also a way to unload a "hot" song that he had "lifted" off of another young man, drifting through town, on his way to Phoenix, and of leaving himself with the satisfaction of having helped somebody out, while

relieving himself of the responsibility of being in possession of a song he didn't compose.

Mr. Jimmy Webb, indeed, acquired the song at a young age. I know that simply because when, in 1962, when I met that man claiming to be a songwriter, I was 24 years old. And Mr. Jimmy Webb is eight years younger than I am.

True; the song could have sat around for any number of years before it ended up in the hands of Mr. Jimmy Webb. Or, yes, it could have gone through the wringer, as it were, for years, as Mr. Webb tried to "promote" it--before it wound up in Mr. Glen Campbell's studio.

I am uncomfortable with thoughts that an un-truth could exist for so long! or, worse, that an un-truth could endure forever! What a horror story! A nightmare to me, if there ever was one, though I probably should not be surprised to think that it happens all of the time. For instance, look at how many innocent people probably went to their execution; having been convicted of crimes they did not commit--before the advent of DNA testing.

## ABOUT MY SINGING

The renditions of the songs I have sung on my albums are not exactly mainstream in today's world of music. They are actually old-fashioned.

They are certainly not of the pop-culture genre; they are not anything like jazz; and not classical. But, yes, they are traditional.

Over the 30, odd-number of years that I have been singing with serious intentions, I have evolved into a classical singer, and so I "bring" to the music a classical style. For shame! that one would sing traditional music in a style not unlike an opera singer would.

At the same time, my singing is comforting, relaxing; gentle, but not without fervor and strength. I would hope, also, that my singing could be inspiring. I have also composed and added quite a few pleasing harmonies. Furthermore, I have the best of the best accompanists accompanying me on the piano, a Mr. Bill Fairfield, who has been for many years, part-and-parcel in developing the highly esteemed reputation of Mumbo Gumbo, a smart northern California folk band.

Now that I have accrued a track record of sorts in art and singing, I feel that it is time for my story to be told--to get it out there for the public, and for the world to hear.

Indeed, my story, to wit, that I composed a song that, with the help of others, Mr. Jimmy Webb, who orchestrated and "promoted" it; Mr Glen Campbell who sang it and accompanied himself on the guitar, became a huge success; a huge hit. A song highly acclaimed by even the critics of today.

I have made a clear statement on my Folk & Country album in a dedication to my mother, that "girl I left, so many times before." I was a young man who needed to find himself, to start a new life; a young man who, without much fore-thought on planning, chose to catch a bus to a land of opportunity, the "sun belt," advertised in many magazines and other news media.

But why should I tell you all there is to know in a letter? An interview would be a much more profitable and comfortable way to do that.

You can find more information on my website; on CD Baby, Amazon, You Tube, iTunes,etc..

I am submitting this letter to my web developer and will ask her to place it on my website--for the record.

Meanwhile, I am

Sincerely,  
Roger Smith (The Idaho Kid)

CC d Jimmy Webb  
CC d Glen Campbell  
CC d Linda Ronstadt

07/05/10

Addendum to the letter to Mr. Carl Watanaby

There may be a question regarding the gentleman whom I met in a place I thought was the famous Buena Vista, near Fisherman's Wharf, in San Francisco, in 1962--an Ivy league dressed, middle-aged fellow, claiming to be a songwriter, and, incidentally, one of the most poker-faced human beings I have ever met.

I need to include him in the scenario that, to wit: he contributed enormously (perhaps, even more than Mr. Jimmy Webb and Glen Campbell, combined) in getting my song, "By the Time I Get to Phoenix" into the marketplace--and ultimately onto the charts.

He, somehow--I do not know how--transposed (or transcribed) what I had sung to him from across a small, square table; one with a red-and-white checkered, plastic, table cloth, resembling the one I grew up with at home. I did not see him write anything down, but one thing he did was to at least twice interrupt me. He would say: "Kid, you swallow your words." I begged to disagree, because of my background singing in choirs, including the U.S. Naval Recruit Choir, a quite prestigious group--and I had also sung in the Carmel Bach Festival, an even more prestigious group.

So, I took light offense at his comments.

But one reason he had trouble hearing me (if, in fact, he did) was because of the loud din of men talking in the large, acoustically "live" room.

These men (I saw nary a woman) were stacked four deep at the bar--a very long bar at that--and all of the tables were full.

After each of his interruptions, I would re-sing the phrase I was working on.

So, the real reason that that poker-faced gentleman interrupted me so often was to either make sure that

his recording device, which he would have had hidden in his tweed-like jacket, would pick up my words and melody--or else it was to help him memorize what I was singing, because he knew that he would have to write everything down after I left. Indeed, when I did leave, he didn't even say "goodbye."

A songwriter I know, when I asked him how the man could have possibly recalled everything that I had sung, short of having a recording device, said: Oh! that's nothing for a professional songwriter.

If it hadn't been for the above-mentioned characters involved in that scenario--especially, the man claiming to be a songwriter--I probably would have completely forgotten about my song. In fact, I did forget about it, until one afternoon early in January, 1968.

I had just completed registering for my final semester at the California College of Arts and Crafts (College and Broadway, Oakland, CA), and took it upon myself to go and relax at one of my favorite haunts, a Shakey's Pizza Parlor--no longer in existence--on College Avenue, just inside the Berkeley City Limits. My roommate and I often went there, and we would have very long walks and talks about art, philosophy, and cultural issues. He was Japanese-American from Honolulu, was an excellent painter/draftsman, and had no end of respect for traditional Japanese ways.

No sooner did I sit down at a booth than a man entered who began changing out songs on the jukebox. After he left, I put some coins into the little jukebox above my table, just to find out what new songs might have recently come out.

Lo and Behold! There was my song!

I won't take up the space required to describe my feelings, my thoughts; my elation; my frustration. How I wanted to shout it from the "highest hill," that that is my song! My song!

Then, I realized something very crucial: people would think of me as a "nut" case if I did that. So, I resolved, then and there, not to talk about it. I wouldn't even tell my trusted roommate. In fact, I have told a few people, down through the years--but very few: perhaps 18 or 20, until I recently finished my CD package. So it's time now to tell the world. And I am shouting it from the "highest hill."

Recently, I have come to wonder if that middle-aged gentleman claiming to be a songwriter had some relationship to the P. F. Sloan whom Mr. Jimmy Webb writes about in his 1970, debut-performance album, "Words and Music"; a person close in age to Mr. Webb, himself, who helped Mr. Webb get his start in the music-writing, performing-and-recording industry (see Mr. Jimmy Webb's website).

The man I met in San Francisco, claiming to be a songwriter, was indeed, old enough to be my father, and would have been 30 years older than Mr. Jimmy Webb. Today, if that man were still alive, he would be 90 years old, plus.

While it's a long shot--barely a hypothesis, I believe that it's not out of the question that that gentleman directly (or indirectly) provided my song to Mr. Jimmy Webb.

One thing is clear; absolutely certain; beyond a shadow of a doubt: Mr. Jimmy Webb knows how, where, and when he acquired my song. And he needs to come forward with a confession.

It is rumored that it's a small world in the upper echelons of the pop-and-country music industry. If

anyone up there knows anything about the nefarious and inordinate events surrounding the production and publication of my song, please, please, please contact me. Thank you. I am

Sincerely,

Roger Smith  
(The Idaho Kid)

CC d Mr. Jimmy Webb  
CC d Mr. Glen Campbell  
CC d Mrs. Linda Ronstadt