

Launches career on Carter

Songwriter pins his hopes on 'Billy-Gate' song



David "Hawk" Billings says his song on Billy-gate fell together in 20 minutes once he had written the chorus line. The song may be his breakthrough in the song-writing field. (Staff photo by John Stano)

Jimmy you ought to be mighty proud of your brother's fame. He proved you could still make a million dollars in America off a name.

From a gas pump jockey to a Libyan chief he turned peanut butter into prime roast beef.

But we're all going to get a little needed relief when brother Billy brings the White House down.

From "The Billy-Gate Song" by David "Hawk" Billings

By MARILYN RILEY

If country music is what starts your toes tapping, you may already have heard this home-grown song poking political fun at the first family.

You can't yet buy "The Billy-Gate Song," which is being played on at least two Detroit area country radio stations. But songwriter David "Hawk" Billings is working on it.

For the 35-year-old Troy resident, the last couple weeks have been a blur of writing, arranging, recording and peddling tapes to radio stations. Now, he's hustling to find a company to produce a "Billy-Gate" record before the Billygate affair turns into old news.

Billings' efforts and the work of financial backer Paul Roncelli have paid off so far.

"Billy-Gate" has sparked "moderate to heavy" requests at WCXI, where disc jockey Deano Day has been playing it on his morning show for the last

week, says station program director Bill Ford.

"THERE ARE NO political overtones," Ford says of the requests. "I don't think it's Republicans or Democrats. Billy Carter is kind of a character and they appreciate him as a character. They think it's a cute song."

Country listeners like novelty songs, which is why the station started playing it, Ford says. Such songs also die quickly, although WCXI will continue playing it as long as the demand is there, he adds.

WPON also has played "Billy-Gate" a few times. But disc jockey David Lee Harper says he won't play the song on his afternoon show because it's not up to the musical quality of other local artists' work played at the station, he says. He likes the lyrics, though.

Billings says the song also is playing on stations in Indiana and Texas.

Not bad for somebody who hated country music until he "caught the bug" about 10 years ago. And in spite of the political theme of the song, Billings says he isn't particularly interested in politics.

"I'M NOT insinuating the White House should come down," he says, explaining his lyrics. I'm just saying the

White House should be cleaned up a little bit, be made white.

"I'm political when it comes to the right and wrong of things, not Democrats or Republicans or anything like that."

Billings says he wasn't all that excited when Roncelli, a client of Billings Landscape where the songwriter makes his living, came to him excited about the idea for a Billy Carter song.

After struggling to write a catchy chorus, Billings wrote the rest of the song in about 20 minutes. He hoped, after rewriting the song into final form, he could let it rest at that. But Roncelli pushed the project and "Hawk" found himself flying to Nashville to see if someone would buy it.

Billings has been writing poetry and songs since he was a child. And from earlier trips to the country music capital, he knew he faced a tough audience. The song wasn't even his favorite of the 200 or so he has written. He wasn't optimistic.

"Everybody loved the song in Nashville," he said, but nobody was willing to record it. Big record companies don't need the headache of a political song and small firms can't produce it fast enough to catch the Billygate wave, he explains.

However, he did get offers to publish but not record the song, offers he turned down because he thought he could attract a recording company. The publishing offers, plus the encouragement he got for his work were even more satisfying than hearing his song on the radio, he says.

"This song to me has already made it. It's done more than I ever dreamed it would do," he explains. "It's been a real inspiration. Now I want to write more than ever."

Billings says he doesn't want to be a big star, just a songwriter respected by his colleagues.

Will it happen? "There's no doubt in my mind that's where I'm going to make my living. I have to. If I don't, it'll be nobody's fault but my own."



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