

Family charts a path to recording stardom

By JIM WINDELL

"We're that close," the father of the Barnowski clan said holding his thumb and index finger a millimeter apart.

That's an agreed upon fact in the Barnowski family. Talk about the future with recording contracts, top nightclub appearances and television programs drifts casually around the living room of the Birmingham home as the seven Barnowski kids, better known as the remarkable entertainment group Relation, sit around looking like ordinary kids and their parents like ordinary parents.

"People don't really know how far we've come," Mark, lead guitarist and on-stage emcee for Relation, said.

He was referring to their Birmingham neighbors who perhaps tend to think of the Barnowski family as that strange family with a lot of kids who spend little time at home and often have two vans and a truck parked in the driveway. In recent years, the family has toured as much as 40 weeks in a year.

With appearances, however, in major clubs such as the Hilton Riviera in Palm Springs, Calif., Fitzgerald's and the MGM Grand Hotel in Reno, Nev., and the Sahara Tahoe in Lake Tahoe, Nev., Relation has gotten important notices. But, they still wait for the big break that everyone in the family is sure will come.

THE WRITING, production and release of their first album, "Relation 1980," earlier this year may attract the attention of a large record company with the prospect of more recordings and appearances for the four-brother and three-sister singing and musical group.

It has taken the family 11 years to get where it is and each member has worked very hard to come within a whisper of stardom.

While 25-year-old keyboard player and musical arranger Wally said, "We have the potential for being nationally recognized," other family members point out that in the past years the group played every wedding, fair and

shopping center they could find to gain experience and exposure.

In 1978, they even had an appearance on Chuck Barris' nationally televised "Gong Show." They proudly state that they had a perfect 30 points from the judges.

Wally, an athletic and talented young man who finished first in his Brother Rice graduating class despite being on the road during school months, explained how Relation got started.

"We started individually on different instruments. Mark, Ken and I all played instruments, so we formed a trio in 1968. Two years later when Steve was 8, he joined us.

"By that fall, we had six members after Gayle and Laurie joined up. Finally, Julie, who is the youngest member of the Barnowski clan at 16, didn't want to be left out and she came into the group four years ago."

Relation is presently made up of 27-year-old Ken on drums, Wally on keyboards, Mark on lead guitar and emcee, Steve on bass, Laurie on keyboards and Gayle and Julie as singers. All members of the group sing and dance after extensive professional training in voice and choreography.

In their shows, as well as in their album, they emphasize harmonies and showcase the multi-talented aspects and styles of the seven members.

"When we do a show," Wally said, "we try to appeal to a family audience. The songs we do range from 1930s numbers to more contemporary things including a country medley ranging from Gene Autry to Willie Nelson."

THEY WRITE some of their own songs and their album is a collection of 12 original songs in a variety of styles with a heavy flavor of current pop, country and rock melodies.

"We wanted to show the recording industry that we have a variety of styles and that we have the talent and are willing to work for ourselves," Wally said.

The album, which is getting favorable responses and surprising amounts of air play in diverse parts of the country, is a joint effort of the Barnowski

family that is a model of a cooperative spirit.

Mark, Steve and Wally composed the songs with arrangements by Wally. Most of the instrumental music is by Relation and production and financing was by their own Parent Production Company.

Relation, Inc. is a legal corporation which helps to organize the group in a structured, but friendly business relationship. Ken Barnowski, Jr. is president (he also has an accounting degree from Eastern Michigan University), and Steve is vice president.

Mark is president of the record label R&A Records while Steve handles the editing chores of a regular newsletter that goes to an estimated 5,000 readers. Wally maintains a file of every record company, radio station and newspaper in the country and each major media source got a hand-written letter, a copy of the album and a press kit.

When they are on tour, they haul their own lighting, stage equipment, wardrobe, sound equipment and sound technician.

"Our act is self-contained," Steve said. "We learned all this by ourselves, but we made a lot of mistakes along the way."

Mrs. Ruth Barnowski, mother, travels with her kids and acts as chaperone and wardrobe mistress. Ken Barnowski Sr. is a CPA who may be chairman of the board, but he has a more important function.

"We use dad to get us out of financial trouble," Mark said, only half joking.

What these seven kids have learned along the road to stardom in the entertainment business is how long that road is and how much work it takes. "We hope," Mark said about the future, "that we can be at the top of our line and major force in entertainment."

Mark also added, "We're not afraid to work to make what we want happen."

But, dad is always quietly in the background adding a cautionary note and never letting anyone get too many stars in their eyes. "We're doggone close, but we're not there... yet."



A Birmingham family, the Barnowskis, are still waiting for that big break that will push them into the national spotlight. Known professionally as Relation, they are: (left to right) lower: Laurie, Gayle, Wally and Julie and upper: Mark, Steve and Ken.

Oakway Symphony season to begin

Oakway Symphony Orchestra begins the new season with a musical sampler drawn from eight of Rodgers and Hammerstein's most famous musicals. The two performances, at 8 p.m. Sept. 20 and 3 p.m. Sept. 21, will be held at Harrison High School's Performing

Arts Centre, 12 Mile, east of Orchard Lake Road, Farmington Hills. The orchestra, directed by Francesco Di Blasi, together with Performing Artists Unlimited (PAU), produced by Bill Premin and Andrew Henderson will provide music, singing and dancing

from "Carousel," "State Fair," "South Pacific," "King and I," "Sound of Music" and "Oklahoma."

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