

A&M red carpets Vannelli

The setting was Toronto's Colonial Tavern (Aug 26) and the stage was set for A&M's showcasing of one of their hottest items, Gino Vannelli. Gerry Lacoursiere, managing director of A&M's Canadian operation, his director of national sales, Joe Summers and their national and regional promotion departments had pulled all stops in their effort to introduce Montreal's Vannelli to the plum of the market - Toronto. This was the first time a record company had arranged a champagne party for an act's Toronto opener and a particularly unique happening for a Canadian act. It was A&M's party and with an audience draw of almost three hundred retail, racker, press and radio people as well as representatives from other record companies, it was obvious that A&M had taken over the complete club for their "bubbly" evening. Vannelli's single, "People Gotta Move" is currently making good gains on the RPM Top Singles chart (*32) and is showing indications of breaking in the U.S., with picks by Gavin and Cash Box as starters. Martin Melhuish, freelance music writer (Billboard, Performance, That's Showbusiness and others) had come across the Vannelli sound in its early stages and RPM asked him to do a piece on his findings which follows:

SPECIAL TO RPM

It's funny how things develop in the music industry. A record company promotion man can hop up and down in front of you for months expounding the merits of this

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A&M's Managing Director, Gerry Lacoursiere (l) and the label's Director of National Sales, Joe Summers, flank Gino Vannelli at recent "champagne party" - Colonial (Toronto).

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record or that and more often than not you have to conclude that the man's ears must have slipped around to the back end of his anatomy.

And then I think of my chance encounter with the music of Gino Vannelli. I first heard Vannelli's debut single for A&M "Crazy Life" on an old stereo set at the quaint offices of CHRC in Quebec City — the station at which you have to walk through the washrooms to get to the P.D.'s office — last winter. I had been in Quebec to see Shawn Phillips' concert at the Capitol Theatre there and had spent the better part of the day visiting some of the radio stations in that city with Charley Prevost, who was at that time the Quebec promotion man for A&M before leaving to take up an on-air spot on CHOM-FM in Montreal and then return to A&M, this time at their Toronto offices, as national press officer.

I remember that Prevost and the P.D. only spoke French to each other and because of my lack of expertise at the language, I contented myself with sitting off to one side smiling and nodding at regular intervals to indicate that I was still very much involved in the conversation as each record on Prevost's schedule was played and commented on.

And then they played Vannelli's "Crazy Life", "Au bout" I uttered, drawing on some French slang that I had been practicing for the few days previous. It was the most novel sound that I had ever heard and Canadian to boot. You see Vannelli and his cohorts Graham Lear, Richard Baker, Anthony Gillia, John Mandell and his brother Joe Vannelli had been kicking around Montreal for quite a few years beforehand and I am told that he even had a contract with RCA in Canada previously under the name Vann Elli. Needless to say, it was a less than auspicious association.

After leaving RCA, Gino and Joe began looking for other opportunities and soon realized that nobody was paying much attention in this country. They did a demo tape in their own basement and then geared their thinking towards the U.S.

Their break came when a friend of the family offered to go to the U.S. with them — specifically Los Angeles — to make a deal for them and off they went, Gino and Joe and their newly found and more than optimistic mentor.

There had been previous contact with Trini Lopez who was very interested in Gino's music but they wanted to try a few other alternatives to just see what they could come up with. Feeling that they might find sympathetic ears with a person of their own nationality, they took the tapes to Frank Sinatra's office. The problem is they had to get passed the secretary first and she was not at all helpful with their cause in fact she only assisted them in pointing out the door that they had entered the office by.

Undaunted, their next stop was the A&M headquarters in Los Angeles where they left the tapes with Lou Mancuso — another Irishman — the A&R director of A&M. Mancuso found time to listen to the material and within a few songs he knew he was interested. He took the tapes into Herb Alpert and so taken was he with what he heard that he called the Vannelli's, who had since returned to Montreal, and told them to fly back down to talk to him as soon as possible. Alpert actually produced the first Vannelli album "Crazy Life."

As it turned out, "Crazy Life" didn't make any great impact on the market but there was new material and this time instead of Gino and Joe virtually playing all the instruments on the session, they had returned to Montreal and picked up four other musicians: Richard Baker on organ and keyboard who had just played local Montreal clubs in the past; Graham Lear who had played with the semi-successful Canadian band Natural Gas; Anthony Gillia on congas and John Mandell on percussion also from Montreal.

With these new musicians the band went into the studio again and put together another album "Powerful People" that did justice to its title. It was powerful alright and driving and in spots, even intense. Though Gino has said many times that he would rather not button hole his style — he writes all the material by the way — let me just say that to this writer's ears anyway, he has managed a perfect blend of bossa nova, rock, jazz and r&b that emerges sounding as fresh as anything to come along in the last ten years. No doubt about it, Vannelli is the father of "bonorojarb."

As it became more and more obvious that they had a unique talent on their hands, Richard Burkhart, who is Herb Alpert's as well as Vannelli's manager began lining up club and concert dates. He made his official American debut playing second on the bill to Liza Minelli for two nights and then was booked for a couple of weeks into Lake Tahoe and Las Vegas.

It was while he was in Las Vegas that I first spoke to Vannelli and was surprised by his very quiet and polite manner which seemed to contradict his recorded performance. It was just about the time also that CKGM in Montreal had started to play the cut "People Gotta Move" from the album and was not long after that on the basis of the excitement that the album cut was generating that A&M decided to release it as a single in Canada.

Soon other stations across Canada started to go on it and chart positions became as plentiful as playlists. As the action continued to grow, Burkhart decided that it was time to look into some bookings in the Canadian market. The Colonial in Toronto was the first club to confirm a week's engagement for him and then the Kego Club in Vancouver. At his Vancouver opening A&M invited all of the local press and radio people in the area and Rick Davis, the manager of the Kego Club reports that everyone was thoroughly impressed by what they saw and heard.

The past week Vannelli was at the Colonial in Toronto and A&M pulled all the stops to make sure his debut in that city was a success. According to A&M's national press officer Charley Prevost, it was a champagne party and all of the club's 250 seats were bought up by the record company for the opening night. Some prominent journalists were flown in from the U.S. and other parts of Canada for the affair including Arthur Levy one of the editors of the Ft. Lauderdale, Florida-based music paper Zoo World which has in the past been a great booster of Canadian talent in the U.S.

In October, Vannelli will play the In Concert club and a venue yet to be announced in Ottawa. A North American tour is also being discussed, the magnitude of which will likely depend on the reaction that Vannelli gets in Canada in the next month.

At the moment Gino Vannelli stands a good chance of being the next Canadian artist to make a significant impact on the international charts. He is very high on my list of pros-

pects anyway. There are very few others on the roster that are making gains as Vannelli at the moment and that certainly has to make him an even money favourite. At any rate make that \$10. to show Mr. Bookmaker. Martin Melhuish/Billboard

VANNELLI CAPTURES VANCOUVER MARKET

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Just finished working with Gino Vannelli and can honestly say he's one of the most talented artists in the music business today. He played one week at the Kego Club here in Vancouver. Being a promotion man, it's so easy to get blasé towards many artists -



A&M's Bruce Bissell and Gino Vannelli, backstage at Vancouver's Kego Club.

especially when the artist isn't an established act. Gino Vannelli, at the present time, isn't a household word, but I predict he'll be a very major, major act worldwide before the year is out.

Gino is like a breath of fresh air - his music and vocal style are truly unique and fresh. He has put together a band that doesn't have a guitar and bass etc. etc. and they are all excellent musicians. They've also



Vannelli's Vancouver appearance brought out local VIPs (l to r) Bruce Bissell, Sherry Kaiway (Pro Sound) Simon Ginsberg, Carol Ouellet, Vannelli, Rick Davis (Kego Club), Christine Paliwoda (House of Stein), Joyce Falkowski (C-FUN), Peter Benson (C-FUN), Judi Sallay (Vancouver Week Magazine - kneeling in front).

worked on their stage presence - lighting - sound and it's all very tight and truly professional.

I can't say enough in regard to Vannelli's music. He's a well-rounded entertainer who's taken the time to really learn the business.

Bruce Bissell
A&M Records
Vancouver

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