

**RPM**  
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Programmers  
WEEKLY



**THE TOP 100  
SINGLES & LPs**

## Hampshire - "exciting new presence"

50 CENTS  
Volume 19 No. 12  
May 5, 1973

Keith Hampshire—the disc jockey-turned full-fledged recording act—is possibly one of the most exciting "new" presences on the Canadian scene this year.

His recent success is pegged to two A&M singles "Daytime Night-Time", and "First Cut Is The Deepest", and a Bill Misener-produced album entitled "The First Cut". The story behind Hampshire's newly-won success is as rambling, as lengthy, as agonizing and ultimately as intriguing as the record industry tends to be.

The Hampshire saga began on the morning of November 23, 1945 in London, England. He was a pretty English baby and, at 11 pounds 4 ounces, a big one.

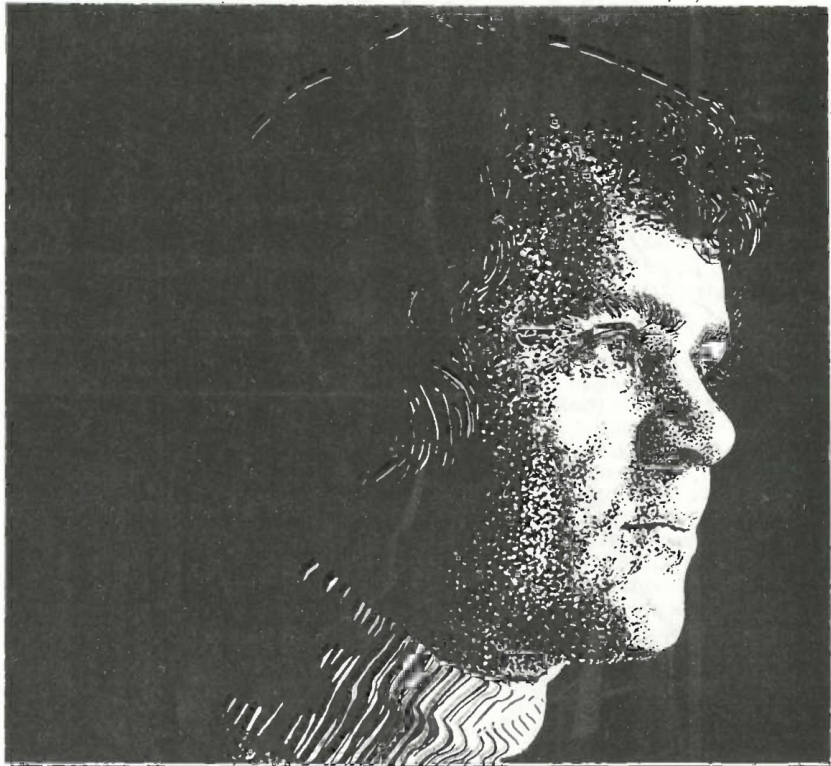
By 4, Keith was being spoonfed on strong doses of ballet and tap-dancing lessons. He made his theatrical debut that year in a children's dance show for parents. It wasn't exactly the big time.

"I was the star of the show", said Keith dryly. "The show was based on the circus and I was the ringmaster. I also played Georgie Porgie."

From then on, apparently, it was all downhill—a good flaming finish. His glittering debut evoked sufficient disinterest to ground his stage career for over twenty years.

"But, I've got some nifty pictures of me dressed in some really wierd get-ups", Keith

*HAMPSHIRE CONT'D on pg. 5*





HAMPSHIRE continued from FP

says. "I can remember kicking my leg up against the wall and all that." Two years following his stage triumph his family arrived in New York and took a train to Toronto where they bought a battered sedan and made the long trek west to Calgary, Alberta.

Keith recalled the cross-country family jaunt with a certain ironic, but fond detachment: "I stood up the entire way! My sister would get car sick so she got the window that was open. My window was covered up with clothes and suitcases and I had to lean against a trunk for support."

While growing up in Calgary, Keith sang in the local Anglican church choir and took weekly vocal lessons for three years from a stern, old dowager. He learned enough to walk off with prizes in a number of Kiwanis-sponsored singing contests. The same as a lot of people, he spent a lot of time with late night radio, dial switching around to pull in a favourite station.

At sixteen, he was still an honest-to-god soprano as well as being frustratingly short. "I was five foot one", he moaned, "a midget. I didn't develop until very late in life. I was called 'shorty', 'runt', and 'chubby'."

Any lingering suspicion that he was becoming a nobody vanished when, at seventeen, his voice (thankfully) changed. At that stage he started going through all the clumsy motions of teenage romance, a distraction that occupied most of his out-of-school time.

At the same time The Depression coffeehouse, operated by John Uren, was spawning an entire generation of high-calibre folk talent like David Wiffen, Donna Warner, Will Millar and Joni Mitchell. During a Sunday amateur night Hampshire sauntered into the club and requested to sing a couple of numbers.

His presence there that evening was probably unforgettable. Keith, who is not an instrumentalist, sang three songs a cappella (missing the golden age of a cappella by just ten years) to a shocked club of folkies. He returned to The Depression the following week and soon was performing there regularly on amateur night. Eventually, he sang (sans guitar) on the local coffeehouse/college/folk society circuit.

When blaring rock 'n' roll became popular, he stopped cutting his hair and quickly auditioned with a band—a third string unit named The Intruders.

"We had exactly one practise," Keith smiled, "in someone's basement. We plugged the microphone into the guitarist's amp. I sang 'Kansas City'. They said, 'yeh, you'll do' and gave me a blue-sequined jacket with white, shiny lapels that came down to my knees. We never played any gigs. I gave the jacket back."

A second group, Keith and the Bristols, folded just as quickly. Keith explained: "Little did we realize that 'Bristols' has other connotations. We thought it was nifty because it was very English sounding." Keith and the Variations, however, did thrive for over three years to develop a fervent following in Alberta. A top teeny scream band with an English influence they played everywhere they possibly could,

usually for little money.

Following graduation from high school Keith was hired at CFCN Radio and Television as a cameraman. Soon he was working at an overwhelming array of things: camera-work, acting, announcing, operating. Chafing restlessly under CFCN's MOR-rock radio format, Hampshire began programming never-heard-before British music on the after-midnight program. He was one of the first Canadians to pick up on Brian Poole & The Tremeloes, the Swinging Bluejeans, the Animals and the Searchers.

However, by 1966, he had become disillusioned with his job and with a band crippled by terminal boredom. The Variations still had a great image, but the whole rock world was whirling by as the band drifted, mostly downward, gigged here and there without rehearsing. Keith had big plans and decided it was time to explore some different alleys. In April, he trundled off to England with a friend. The two adventurers puddle-jumped around Britain in a Morris Minor.

"We slept in the car," Keith declared, "and lived on fish 'n' chips and apple cider because you could be sure wherever you went it was okay. After a month and a half our money was low so we went back to London."

With typical boyish flamboyance Hampshire applied for a disc jockey position on the powerful Radio Caroline, Amsterdam's fifty kilowatt pirate station in the North Sea, on the strength of a letter from CFCN in Calgary. He was being optimistic, he admitted—but only a little.

"I just bullshitted my way onto the ship", Keith said a bit defensively. "I really hadn't had that much experience on radio. I pretended to know what I was talking about and carried it off."

How many British people are there, I wonder, who still sparkle up at the memory of Radio Caroline, the alternate to "Auntie BBC?" The question is purely rhetorical, the answer self-evident. There was a ferment in the British creative world and the oopshoop-shang-alang-a-jingbop of Mersey Beat was still bubbling. And, when pirate radio flourished in England, so did English pop music. The giants—the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, the Who—all blossomed under the aegis of the first pirates.

For thirteen months Keith was a certified English idol, subjected to the hundred-thousand watt glare of the English pop press, enjoying the glow and warmth of cocktail-partying with well-known stars, hosting, first "Keefer's Uprising" morning show, and later, "Keefer's Commotion" in the afternoon.

"There were no less than two million people listening to Radio Caroline at anytime," he stated. "The average listening audience was 8 million. Peak listening audience was between 15 and 20 million. It hit the continent too."

However, there's most likely a lot of memories in that institution most people will never understand. The exercise was sheer lunacy for the ship's DJs. Onboard; tension, jokes about women in town and exchanges

of the ritual falsities of each other's youthfulness. In town; they lived in high style but were ultimately toted up Radio Caroline's gangplank with feet dragging after shore leave.

"It was a strange existence," agreed Keith. "There were so few jocks around that you were treated like pop stars in town. You'd be mobbed everywhere you went. One week out of three you were a star. You'd come back on the boat with eyes hung open with toothpicks."

"The poor Dutch crew were on board for six weeks and they were hornier than hell. We'd come on: 'ooohhhh woowwww man, ohhhh, this blond I had last night . . . .'. Their tongues would drag on the ground. They'd go off as just sailors. However, for the other two weeks you were a nobody sailor sitting in a box talking to yourself and playing records."

Hampshire quit Radio Caroline on August 14, 1967, the day the Marine and Etc. Broadcasting Offences Act was passed by the British Parliament. The act, which elicited a virtual flood of comment and criticism, stipulated that anyone helping the pirates in any way would be liable to heavy fines or up to two years in jail. British firms advertising on pirate radio would be subject to heavy fines and penalties.

"When the boats finally closed down we got mobbed by 10,000 people at the Liverpool Street Station. People came out to support their favourite jock. I've never seen anything like it."

What remained for Hampshire after the dust had settled was a yearning to return to Canada. Following a holiday on the continent, he flew to Montreal (Ten pound notes stashed carefully in the sleeves of his sportscoat) and took in Expo '67. Soon he drifted to Toronto where he was hired by CKFH radio.

Three years later, Keith was back on the streets scouting work. Various rumours popped up from time to time about his plans. It came as quite a shock to a good many people when it was announced he would appear in the musical revue "You Better Believe It" with Jack Duffy and Julie Amato. He then moved on to a great deal of television, commercials and more stage work.

Through a friend Keith met producer Bill Misener, then working for RCA. Bill was an original member of the Paupers which also included Skip Prokop (now leader of Light-house). Misener had worked as staff producer for RCA for several years, before meeting Hampshire, and was recognized within the industry for various RCA projects.

Hampshire recorded "I Wish I Could Wish Away," written and produced by Misener, during an after hours session at the RCA studio. RCA agreed to release the single (retitled "Ebenezer"). When sales weren't of hit proportions RCA indicated it wouldn't be interested in any future product. "Ebenezer" was a nice little record. Not the end of the world, but a lot better than many of the derivative and substandard singles flourishing at the time.

HAMPSHIRE continued on page 6

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*HAMPSHIRE continued on page 5*

Soon afterwards Keith played Bill "Daytime Night-Time," written by Mike Hugg, an original member of Manfred Mann. Both agreed the song could be a hit if it was cut over again. The two booked the RCA studio, laid down a basic track, and approached A&M of Canada. Misener also decided to form an independent production company.

"Daytime Night-Time," and its powerful successor, "First Cut Is The Deepest", were both well received. The change from "Ebenezer" is overwhelmingly apparent.

The success of the two singles led to the "First Cut" album. Sparked by "Daytime, Night-Time" and "The First Cut is the Deepest", the album is now selling strongly, according to A&M. The album is full of potential singles and the label is now in the throes of deciding which track to release next.

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