

Ozark Mountain Daredevils

The Making of the 1973 Debut Album

The Ozark Mountain Daredevils on Record: A Narrative Discography
Michael Kuelker (FM Books & Music, 2022)

from the CH. 2 - THE A&M YEARS

Once Glyn Johns committed to producing the Ozark Mountain Daredevils [May 1973], things happened rapidly. The band and a few folks in their retinue flew to the UK and resided at Headley Grange as the OMD recorded its debut for A&M Records at Olympic Studios for six weeks in June and July 1973. Both Headley Grange and Olympic were permeated with rock and roll legend.

PAUL PETERSON (Good Karma Management): The record label rented us a place for us out in the country because they thought, okay, these are country guys, can't just have them in the city and we want them to be comfortable. They rented a place called Headley Grange out in the English countryside. And it was famous because, first of all, it was this old mansion and grounds. Parts of it were 400 years old; most of it was 200 years old. Led Zeppelin had rented it at one point and set up a recording truck out there and were recording at Headley Grange. It was also rumored to have ghosts. They saw a ghost or two there, and it scared the crap out of them. They packed up and left.

Every morning we'd pile into this little bus and go back and forth from Headley Grange to the studio every day [about 45 minutes' drive]. Working at the studio was of course a great experience with Glyn. And he unfortunately [Peterson chuckles] really intimidated the guys on the first day because he would jokingly say ... he'd put Supe over here and say, 'McCartney would set up here.' 'Lennon would like to have his guitar right around here, John, so we'll put that over here...' and was like, *gulp*. Everybody was pretty intimidated. They hadn't been anywhere much outside the Springfield area. Suddenly they were on a plane. I don't think Randy and Supe had ever been on an airliner before they went to London.

It was a hugely eye-opening experience for everybody culturally besides musically. You can kind of hear it in the music, that they sounded a little bit like they were away from home. That's the way the tracks sounded to everybody. If you'd never heard them before you wouldn't know that. But you could definitely sense that.

BUDDY BRAYFIELD (keyboards, oboe): Glyn wanted us to record in London for two reasons. He wanted to get us in his studio that he was used to using and he wanted to get us

away from our friends and our family. He was like, 'I want you guys and I want your attention. I don't want your friends and you guys getting drunk and smoking a buncha dope.' And he worked our tails off. It was 10, 11, 12 hour days in the studio. Had weekends off. There wasn't any monkeying around.

On Randy's ballad "Road to Glory," Glyn worked my ass off. I remember we had words because it was just like take after take after take. 'Do it again, I think you can do better, do it again, do it again.' I said, 'What's wrong? What do you *want* me to do better?' He gave me one of his 'Glyn looks' and 'course that took care of it. I shut up real quick then.

The first album was just a lot of hard work and a lot of fun and a lot of awe and being in England and being around Glyn and David and just feeling two feet off the ground and seeing the music come together. Just excitement, at least on my part. Just being there.

RANDLE CHOWNING (guitars, harp): That's one of the neatest things that happened to us, was going to England and working with Glyn. Talk about going to school. It was a crash course in basically rock and roll even though we weren't a rock and roll band.

His playbacks would just pin you to the wall. He would crank everything up to its maximum efficiency. We'd sit there and look at the speakers and swear they would pop out of the enclosures. And he would do that for hours without a break. Now I, to this day, I cannot sit down in front of loudspeakers for over 45 minutes, tops, and I want to get out of the room. I really do. It wears me out, makes me tired. I have to have a break. And Glyn just went forever. It was incredible, scary. It would scare people. A lot of times I would stand in the doorway listening or outside the room just a little bit.

LARRY LEE (drums, keyboards): [Glyn Johns] had a real famous miking technique for drums. He comes from more of an old school. And when we started recording, things started being recorded like with drums, each drum would have a mike on it. Sometimes they'd have a mike on top and a mike on the bottom. They just wanted complete control over the whole drum set individually and then they would mix it that way. Glyn liked to take a 'picture' of the drums. One microphone overhead, one microphone out front at the bass drums, one microphone over by the tom toms. And he just sort of took a picture of the drum sound. It was really cool.

When we did that record, I liked the set up in the control room and just watched what he was doing. Not that I knew what he was doing, but that aspect of being a producer and an engineer, that's what I've always gravitated to. That's why I've always had a studio in my house and got into production in Nashville, just because it was the natural thing for me to want to do.

KUELKER: What kinds of things did David Anderle bring to the process as co-producer?

LARRY LEE: David was just one of these guys who liked to be around. He was fun. I don't remember him giving us a lot of input, like 'try this,' 'do this again,' whereas Glyn did a lot of that. When we did that first record, as the songs progressed as far as what got done to each song, I just remember sitting in the control listening back and going, [incredulously], 'We don't sound

that good!' You know what I'm saying? I just remember sitting there; there was a couch down in front of the control room with big speakers. Cash and Supe and I would go out in back and smoke, which made it all sound even better. It was really thrilling to hear our music sound that way. And a lot of that is Glyn, the way he put the songs together with us, his ideas about what to do.

Ozark Mountain Daredevils

A&M 1973
SP 4411

Country Girl (Randle Chowning)
Spaceship Orion (Larry Lee)
If You Want to Get to Heaven (John Dillon/Steve Cash)
Chicken Train (Cash)
Colorado Song (Dillon/Cash)

Standin' on the Rock (Dillon)
Road to Glory (Chowning)
Black Sky (Cash)
Within Without (Lee)
Beauty in the River (Dillon)

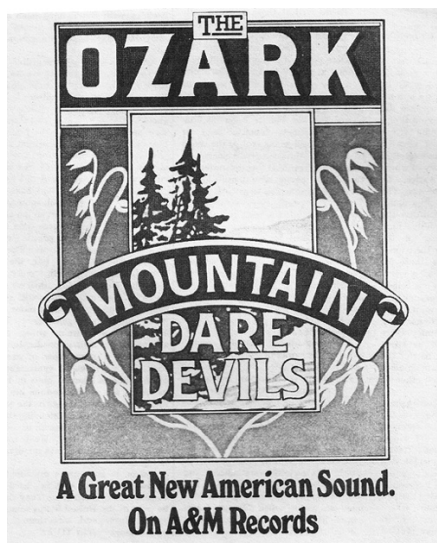
Produced by David Anderle & Glyn Johns
Recorded in June and July 1973 at Olympic Studios in London, England.
Release date: Fall 1973

Buddy Brayfield – piano, vocals, harpsichord, organ, percussion
Steve Cash – vocals, harmonica, percussion
Randle Chowning – vocals, guitar, resonator guitar, harmonica
John Dillon – vocals, guitar, mouthbow, mandolin, fiddle, dulcimer, autoharp, percussion
Michael Granda – bass, vocals, percussion
Larry Lee – vocals, drums, percussion, guitar, saw



"Spaceship Orion"

LARRY LEE: I wrote some of my first songs on a Mahogany Guild Mark 1 Classical that my mom and dad gave me back in high school. After the Bijou had burned down and OMDs were in a holding pattern, I was living in the attic of a small rented house. That house [at Cherokee & Donaldson] had a glassed-in sunroom and I sat in there one day and wrote three songs within an afternoon: 'Spaceship Orion,' 'Within Without' and 'Homemade Wine,' and the next day I wrote 'Rainbird.' All those songs were written on that 1964 Guild classical.





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“If You Wanna Get to Heaven”

STEVE CASH (harp): That’s one of the magic ones.

I was living at my dad’s house for a while in that period because I had no money; ten dollars max. We were getting ready to go over to England; we hadn’t gone yet so we were rehearsing and getting ready for that. I was watching TV with the sound down. John came by one day on a Sunday in the afternoon, and I was reading or going over some stuff, and every time I would look up this guy, this preacher, going like this [gesticulating], fire and brimstone. So I wrote this other song first, “Why Does a Preacher.” And I wrote that out and finished it and then I looked at it again and I wrote ‘Heaven,’ all the lyrics straight through.

A lot of times interviewers take it too seriously. It’s big tongue-in-cheek. That’s the way [the song] was meant to be.

I wrote the lyrics down... It very rarely happens this way, *very* rarely. I wrote the entire lyrics and got ‘em straightened out to where I like ‘em, and I knew inside that this has gotta be rock and roll.

When John came by, I had this funky old Lyle guitar, which is still my guitar to this day [laughs]. The band would never buy me a guitar. They thought that was a lost cause... [laughs]

JOHN DILLON (guitar, fiddle, mouthbow): Horrible guitar.

CASH: I paid five dollars a month and it cost \$70 or \$80. It took me forever to pay off, five dollars a month.

Anyway, I said, ‘Hey, I got a couple of things here’ so he said, ‘Yeah? Let me look at it.’ So I had the lyrics written out there. All he did was he took the guitar, got it in tune, picked it up like this, read the lyrics a couple times through and he went ... ‘If You Wanna Get to Heaven.’ And he said, I think you can play some harp on this. First time through, it was finished, just like it is today. I just went, ‘Okay. Let’s do something else. *We got that one!*’ First time through, literally came out of the air.

There are maybe two or three songs that happened like this. Very rare. He was there at that time and that place, and to me that’s that kismet or whatever you call that, that place/time situation. And he came through. I don’t know where the tune came from but it came straight out with no revisions.

DILLON: It’s like we had been playing it for 10 years. Went from start to finish in the length of the song.

CASH: And I’m not quite sure how we got it that Randy sang lead, but at that time we thought as a band. Different people doing different things.

DILLON: Yeah, somebody else sings somebody’s songs. We also did ‘Why Does a Preacher.’ There’s that chorus...

CASH [singing]: Why does a preacher pound his fist and frown
Why roll his eyes and round the ground
Does he think the price of life ...

DILLON: ‘Something lost and found,’ I think. And then there was that little thing we added... ‘Jesus, precious Jesus, why did you leave us here?’ [Cash & Dillon laugh heartily at this memory and at the near-rhyme of Jesus/leave us.] I did that on the piano, later.

CASH: We've never recorded that.

DILLON: But it's a cool song. Yeah, 'If You Wanna Get to Heaven' ...

CASH: It came out fully dressed ready to go. And it almost didn't make it onto the album. We went over to England. We said, 'Well, Glyn we've got a new song that we want to put in.' We'd already made the selection of 10, 12 songs. He said [Cash affects British accent], 'Oh no, you got another song!' We played it for him. I remember, this is one of the few times I kinda spoke up to him. Afterwards he said, 'I don't know that we want to do that. It's not really like the rest of the songs.' It was rock and roll basically. I got up, I said, 'It may not be the Rolling Stones rock and roll but it's *our* rock and roll.' So he recorded it even though he's still planning to not use it. He spent the time on it and made it what it is. Then when we put the album together and were picking the final cuts, that's when he and Stan ... Stan said that *has* to be on this album. He was adamant about it and Glyn finally folded. 'Okay, we'll put it on there.' And that made all the difference.

PAUL PETERSON: In that interim period when I first got back [from the recording sessions in London], Stan called and said, 'All right, play me the record so I hear how it starts.' I said, well, okay, but there's this other cut that I think you're gonna wanna hear. He said, 'Okay, but just play me how the record starts.' It was 'Country Girl,' and he said, 'Yeah, yeah, that's good.' Let me play you this other thing that's not on the record right now, and that was 'If You Wanna Get to Heaven,' and as soon as the harp started going and everything, he says, 'That's it! That's it! That's the hit.' I said, 'Yeah, it is. *It's not on the record.*' He goes, 'What do you mean?' I said, 'Glyn doesn't like it. He's leaving it off.'

That started a hub-bub – because it was pretty obvious that gee, that's gotta be on the record. And there was a whole different sequence [to the album]. It did start with 'Country Girl' but it was a different sequence. There were only a couple of outtakes like 'Where Does the Magic Go.' Anyway, that kinda started a brouhaha. Stanley, for all his strength in defending the track, over the course of time unfortunately really offended Glyn.

'Country Girl' in the fall of '73 was the first single release and it sort of crept onto the charts in the 90s and then crept off. I think A&M was going to be satisfied at that point. In those days you didn't always have a big hit and you just kept on going. 'At least we got something on the charts and we sold some records and we've gotten it going.'

And we were like, '*No! Wait a second! There's more to come here!*' So we stuck to the 'If You Wanna Get to Heaven' thing and they put that out after the first of the year. 'If You Wanna Get to Heaven' came out in late January and started getting action right away. St. Louis, Kansas City, those markets started wailing on it. We were already doing shows in those towns and playing the colleges and there were kids calling in and requesting.

“Road to Glory”

RANDLE CHOWNING: In my case, it's very difficult to contrive songs. Sometimes it goes beyond a title or anything. It's just a feeling that you're in a mood so to speak.

The interesting thing about that is, I had a brother who was quite a bit older than me, seven years older, and we started getting together as adults when the Daredevils got together. He went out on the road with us and road managed with us and was a great bit of the glue that kept the band together.

When I was working on that song, the very first idea, and I hadn't seen my brother for a period of probably two years, and I was still at my parents' house, still in college here in Springfield. I was

sitting there working on that song. And my brother just walked in the door. No knock, he just came in the door; I hadn't seen him in a couple of years. That was when he moved back to Springfield for a time. He'd been all over, in the Air Force and a number of things. It was very unusual. At that particular point, I was just in the beginning of trying to get the band, what became the band, to get them together to exchange songs.

The song, it came from a vibe. It's kind of what I am going back to [in 2015]. I guess the way to describe it would be, standing out in the mountains and just looking and feeling what the scenery is and what does that describe to you? What does the scenery make you want to play musically? So it's kind of ethereal. You just have to open yourself up to the Ghost Writer in the Sky so to speak and let it flow.

“Colorado Song”

JOHN DILLON: We had a big gig, we went out to Boulder, Colorado [April 1973]. Most of us had never been out to Colorado before, never seen the mountains. We played this pretty famous club out there called the Tulagi's, which is on the strip, the hill, by the school in Boulder, a really famous club, and we opened for Jerry Jeff Walker.

We had a couple days off and we were staying at some little floppy motel. Most of us had never been to the Rockies. We thought, let's go up to the Rockies; we've got the van. And we went up there, kinda got lost back in some woods and found some ledge kinda looking out over everything. We were doing some stuff up there ... I remember the phrase of the day was, 'Man, I don't know about you but I'm stoned as a goose.' Which I never could understand. What are those big things sticking up out there? And Cash, who was kinda the sage of the group, said *those are mountains...*

We were pretty inspired by the whole deal, it was just beautiful out there. Steve and I went back to this fleabag motel. And it came pretty quickly. I had this tuning that was hard for me to tame. Open tuning. He had a pad and a pencil ... and I think it predates John Denver ["Rocky Mountain High"] by about four years.

SUPE GRANDA (bass) (to KSHE): We recorded it once, and Glyn said, 'Let's record it again, gentlemen, but don't play it as safe.' So we kinda had a raucous version and we had a more tempered version. We got ready to mix the song and Glyn said, 'I really like the way you guys played the body of the song in this one version but I really liked the way you played the outro of the song on this other version.' He got out the tapes and sliced the tape with the razor blade and spliced. The first half of the song was played with a more calculated approach and then it gets to the end and then it zips right into the one that we played with more energy.

“Chicken Train”

PAUL PETERSON: The magic take of 'Chicken Train' was not there [on the debut album]. It was like the perfect take and when it was over, they just went, 'Wow, that was really it.' For some reason, it was not on the tape, so they had to do it over again and we still got a real good take on it, but there was a magic one that got away.

Author's note – There's a lengthy tale of the origins and development of "Chicken Train" elsewhere in the book. After all, there's much to cluck about when it comes to this song.

Kuelker's commentary on the lyrics

Ozark Mountain Transcendentalism

Think of our life in nature, – daily to be shown matter;
to come in contact with it – rocks, trees, wind on our cheeks!
The solid earth! the actual world! the common sense!
Contact! Contact!

– Henry David Thoreau in *The Maine Woods*

You only need sit still long enough in some attractive spot in the woods
that all its inhabitants may exhibit themselves to you by turns.

– Thoreau in “Brute Neighbors” (*Walden*)

The songs on *Ozark Mountain Daredevils* convey a deep rootedness in the world with a spirituality free from dogma. Themes of *renewal through creation* and a recognition of the *mystery of creation* abide in these 10 cuts.

In the first line of the debut Randle Chowning sings, “well look see the moon comes risin’, tomorrow is yesterday” in the sweetly lilting “Country Girl.” The lyric relates both a natural, real time fact and a reflection that time is not just the unfolding of minutes and days; time creates tomorrows which grow out of and reflect the past.

The album will do this repeatedly – point to something demonstrable, to something in the visible world, and then conjure an idea, an image, something that the singer pulls from the unseen.

“Country Girl” introduces Rueben the Cobbler, whose story and song are wrapped up with the song’s “I,” whose identification with Rueben intensifies upon the latter’s passing. “And I wonder to be there with him in that sky of gray / we’d sit on a cloud and cry out loud till tomorrow is yesterday.” The impressionistic lyrics in the verses suggest a dream world; the chorus is simpler and catchy to go along with the gently undulating music:

Oh country girl, oh won't you come to me tonight
Oh country girl, smother me with delight
Oh country girl, you drive away the pain
Oh country girl, you make sunshine of the rain

"Spaceship Orion" communicates a plain-spoken idea, that relocation on another planet won't save humanity if we kill the Earth through eco-destruction or war. But this is not a didactic song. Rather, the problem of the song is set forth –

When the man comes to you
Tells you what you always knew was comin'
You feel it came twice as fast
You always thought the world would last way past you

– in a melodious musical form, and the listener, on the strength of the rich-bodied radiance of Larry Lee’s voice, is carried through a reflection of environmental apocalypse and transport on Spaceship Orion through outer space. The song does not arrive at a destination. In fact, we know nothing of the destination other than that it is “a world exactly different / from the one you left behind” (a doppelganger!). Ultimately, the story concludes with the singer’s yearning lyric, “It can’t be like home, it can’t feel like home till you’re there.”

The upshot of “If You Wanna Get to Heaven” is that “you got to raise a little hell,” asserting another linkage between the earthly and the abstract and unseen. “Heaven” tells us we have to Get Up and Get It. “If you want a drink of water, you got to get it from a well.” “If you want to see an angel, you got to find it where it fell.” The first of those is a bodily necessity; the second, a spiritual need. The middle stanza asserts, “if you want to know a secret, you got to promise not to tell,” which signals the need to exercise self-discipline. These are wonderfully unconventional articulations of hellraising.

“Chicken Train” offers a vision of the Absurd. From the sounds of the song, especially the prominent mouthbow and harmonica, and from the lyrics about the “chicken train running all day,” we know we are in rural territory. But we don’t know much more, other than that the singer “can’t get on / can’t get off” and bids the “chicken train [to] take your chickens away.” We learn from the lean second verse that there is a laser beam in the singer’s dreams, a “laser beam like a sawed-off dream.” This truncation of the laser beam is significant. Even in this crazy dream, the singer alludes to something vast which lies beyond the visible.

The first four songs have proceeded thematically as songs of renewal / mystery / renewal / mystery. The album carries on with “Colorado Song” and “Standin’ on the Rock,” songs of renewal, followed by three numbers, “Road to Glory,” “Black Sky” and “Within Without,” which explore mysteries of creation in dreamscape settings before “Beauty in the River” concludes *Ozark Mountain Daredevils* on the theme of renewal through creation.

What does it mean to say that these songs are spiritual? To pick two:

“I been standin’ on the rock waitin’ for the wind to blow [x2] / I been standin’ on the rock waitin’ for my seeds to grow” are lyrics expressing faith in a seed. A space exists between planting and reaping, and the grower fills that space with thought and act, the physical works of cultivating and something immaterial such as hope, prayer, trust, faith. In that space lies the great ontological agrarian pact. This is surely why “waitin’ for my seeds to grow” never fails to elicit a cheer from audiences in concert. The expression of faith in a seed is reaffirmed by a verse that implores, “Better get back to the country, look around and find you a home [x2] / Better get back to that country, that’s where we all come from.”

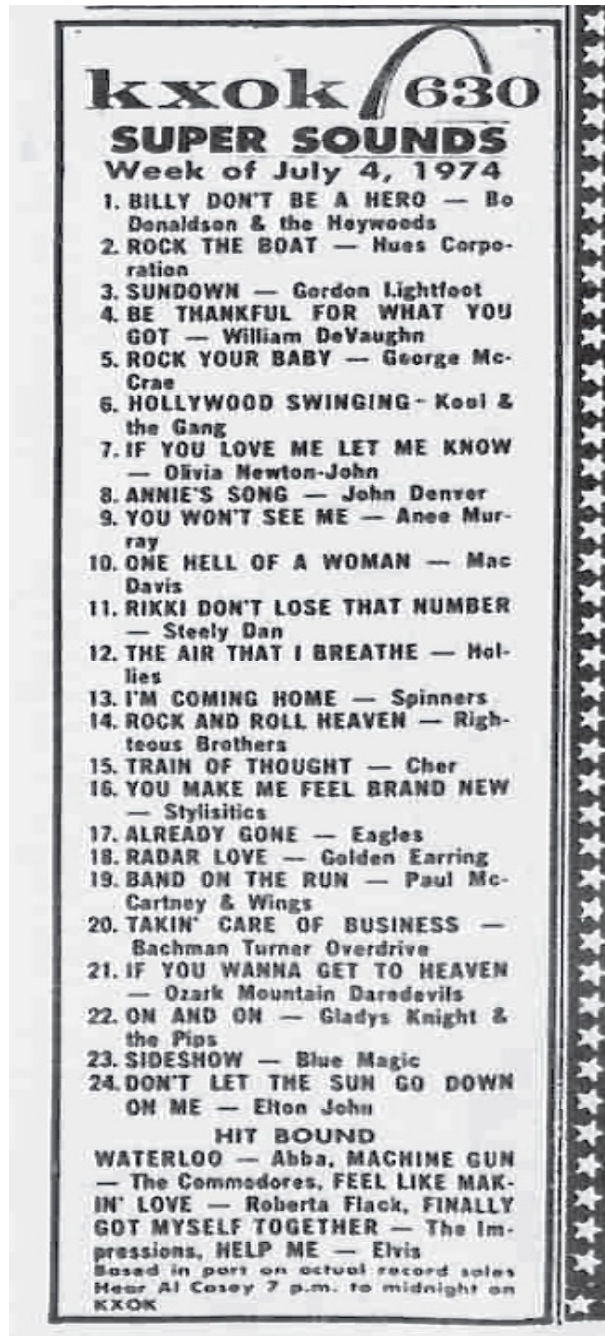
“Beauty in the River” radically re-contextualizes the New Testament narratives of *rolling away the stone*, which happens with the dead Lazarus and the crucified Christ, both of whom were buried in cave-tombs sealed with large stones. In one narrative, Christ commands that the stone covering Lazarus’ tomb be rolled; in the other, it is said that an angel of the Lord turns the stone over. The act of rolling away the stone in both cases signifies revelation – that Lazarus is not dead, that Christ is resurrected.

“Beauty” situates transformation among the congregation, the “we” rather than “He,” and it takes us from “a city of light on that foggy mountaintop / where the wind is never still” down to the valley, the bottomlands, the flowing river.

We must all stand in the water
We must find it when we roam
It don’t matter what is said

We can wake up from the dead
And roll away the stone
We can roll away the stone

This is where the album leaves us: on the temporal plane, our bodies plunged in water, in a sensate world alive with revelation and renewal beyond rational explanation.



kxok 630
SUPER SOUNDS
Week of July 4, 1974

1. BILLY DON'T BE A HERO — Bo Donaldson & the Heywoods
2. ROCK THE BOAT — Hues Corporation
3. SUNDOWN — Gordon Lightfoot
4. BE THANKFUL FOR WHAT YOU GOT — William DeVaughn
5. ROCK YOUR BABY — George McCrae
6. HOLLYWOOD SWINGING — Kool & the Gang
7. IF YOU LOVE ME LET ME KNOW — Olivia Newton-John
8. ANNIE'S SONG — John Denver
9. YOU WON'T SEE ME — Anne Murray
10. ONE HELL OF A WOMAN — Mac Davis
11. RIKKI DON'T LOSE THAT NUMBER — Steely Dan
12. THE AIR THAT I BREATHE — Hellos
13. I'M COMING HOME — Spinners
14. ROCK AND ROLL HEAVEN — Righteous Brothers
15. TRAIN OF THOUGHT — Cher
16. YOU MAKE ME FEEL BRAND NEW — Stylistics
17. ALREADY GONE — Eagles
18. RADAR LOVE — Golden Earring
19. BAND ON THE RUN — Paul McCartney & Wings
20. TAKIN' CARE OF BUSINESS — Bachman Turner Overdrive
21. IF YOU WANNA GET TO HEAVEN — Ozark Mountain Daredevils
22. ON AND ON — Gladys Knight & the Pips
23. SIDESHOW — Blue Magic
24. DON'T LET THE SUN GO DOWN ON ME — Elton John

HIT BOUND
WATERLOO — Abba, MACHINE GUN — The Commodores, FEEL LIKE MAKIN' LOVE — Roberta Flack, FINALLY GOT MYSELF TOGETHER — The Impressions, HELP ME — Elvis

Based in part on actual record sales
Hear Al Casey 7 p.m. to midnight on KXOK

KXOK in St. Louis. "If You Wanna Get to Heaven" hit the charts in 1974.