

Music's Western Outpost

successful songwriter, Owens was co-writer of "A Dear John Letter," the 1953 hit disk by Jean Shepard and Ferlin Husky, and sole writer of "Same Old Me," a 1959 hit for Ray Price.

In 1966 station KUZZ was bought by Buck Owens, who broke big as a solo recording artist in 1963. Owens' first hit actually came four years earlier on a song he wrote with Dusty Rhodes, "Under Your Spell Again." He was then working in Washington where he had migrated, where he thought he had better opportunities than in Bakersfield. For a spell (three releases) he recorded for Pep Records of Pico, Rivera. He also functioned as lead guitarist on recording dates of various Capitol artists, among them veteran entertainer Tommy Collins, a long-time Bakersfield resident. Impressed by his guitar artistry, Capitol executives quickly lured him away from the Pep label. Beginning with "Act Naturally," written by two Bakersfield songsters, which made No. 1 in 1963, Owens has had a steady succession of No. 1 disks totalling 15 to date. It is a record unequalled by any artist, pop or country.

Along with his amazing success as a performer and Capitol recording artist, has come an enormous expansion of Owens' business activities, all of them centered in Bakersfield. In 1962 he formed Blue Book Music, which now holds the copyrights to all of his hits and has exclusive contracts with Merle Haggard, Tommy Collins, Wyn Stewart and other country writers. The following year, he formed Omac Artist Corp. with manager Jack McFadden (Omac is a combination of Owens and McFadden), which now represents country artists on many record labels. Having bought KUZZ, he later took over station KTUF and has recently launched KUZZ-FM. Not too long ago, he opened a record shop on Bakersfield's Chester Avenue that specializes in country disk. He has his own printing plant and through his production company, films a syndicated show that is now to be seen in 25 markets. As a result of his far-flung enterprises, he has twice received the "Headliner Award" from Bakersfield's Chamber of Commerce for his role in publicizing the town nationally.

Another Bakersfield musician whose growth almost matches Owens' is Semie Moseley. A former guitar player in his early '30's, Moseley is now the sole owner of the Mosrite Guitar factory, a concern that he could have sold for several million dollars not too long ago. As recently as the 1950's, both his brothers were stranded in the Midwest when an evangelist group with whom they were playing went broke. While Andy Moseley picked cotton in Arizona to get back on his feet, Semie took a job in a Los Angeles guitar factory at a dollar an hour. After two years during which he established himself as a rock 'n' roll guitarist, he bought a set of guitar maker's tools and went into the business of custom-manufacturing instruments. The name Mosrite is a combination of Moseley and Boatright, after a friend Roy Boatright who encouraged the undertaking.

Merle Travis and Joe Maphis were among the first performers to order guitars from Moseley. But even though he operated out of a North Bakersfield garage, he was soon deeply in debt. Temporary aid came when a local rancher offered him an unused building on his grounds

rent-free. Necessary capital later became available when the Ventures, a Liberty recording group, undertook the exclusive distribution of the entire Mosrite line. A short time ago, Moseley bought the rights to the famous Dobro name and a line of resonator instruments. Today, his factory employs over 50 workers with an annual payroll of over \$200,000, he acts as his own distributor, and is in the process of opening a new guitar factory in Puerto Rico.

Apart from the exposure afforded by radio and TV, flourishing clubs account for Bakersfield's growth as a country music center. The Blackboard, from whose stage Bill Woods and Cousin Herb Henson nightly entertained oil workers and dirt farmers, is still in existence. There are also the Lucky Spot, Tex's Barrel House, the Flamingo and the Golden West Ballroom.

Country music has been a staple in all of these, as in clubs that dot the California coast, south to Signal Hill on the outskirts of Long Beach and to San Diego on the Mexican border. On Signal Hill, where the Academy of Country and Western Music held its installation of officers this year, the famous Foothill Club, whose front doors look out on the steel towers and gooney birds of numerous oil wells, has played host to a long line of country performers, including Stuart Hamblen, who was its featured performer from 1946-1948. That was long before he became known as the writer of such great country songs as "This Ole House," "Remember Me, I'm the One Who Loves You" and "It Is No Secret."

A long-time resident of Bakersfield, Billy Mize, is currently occupying the stage at the Foothill Club. Host for many years of Gene Autry's Saturday night TV show, "Melody Ranch," Mize is a Columbia Records artist and a successful songwriter, author-composer of "The Shoe Goes on the Other Foot Tonight," a hit in 1966 for Marty Robbins. Two other writer-performers who call Bakersfield home are Tommy Collins and Red Simpson. Collins is the writer of a long list of country hits, the most recent of which is his own Columbia disk of "If You Can't Bite, Don't Growl" (1966). Red Simpson, who was born in Higley, Ariz., and whose family settled in Bakersfield when he was three, is a recording artist, but is better known for his writing talent. With Buck Owens, he was responsible last year for the No. 1 country song, "Sam's Place."

What Bakersfield has lacked, in the opinion of many music folk, to give it the recognition it deserves, is a professional recording studio comparable to those in nearby Los Angeles. Until recently, the only studio was one operated by Tumbleweed Turner, a country deejay who has been heard six nights a week on KPMC for years. It was equipped to produce excellent demos and monaural recordings. But now Bakersfield has Gary Paxton, a first-rate engineer and dynamic personality, who has just built a large up-to-date studio in a former bank building on Chester Avenue. Now, many of Bakersfield's artists who had been compelled to travel to Hollywood for record sessions, may find that they have top equipment and engineering savvy right at home. This development could mark the turning point in Bakersfield's desire to shed the "Little Nashville" label and to become known as the Country Music Capital of the West.

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