

To compensate, he opened a publishing firm, which now is located in a building at the corner of Los Angeles music business, Hollywood and Vine. It is a strange office in that Robertson rations the time he spends in it. When he came out of the depression into which his son's death cast him, he made a vow to spend as much time as he possibly could with his new fam-

ily: wife, Irene, a former airline stewardess, and two little girls they adopted. It is also a strange office in that there is a small room next to a large audition room where Don spends part of the day when he is in the office. The small room contains a workshop so that Don can work with his hands. He finds that hand motion is stimulating to mind motion and to songwriting.

More than a decade ago, Don had a hit record on his own. Combined world-wide sales of "The Happy Whistler" have now topped the million mark. On RCA Victor he also has an LP "Heart on My Sleeve" on which he sings and plays 12 of his hits. Currently under contract as an artist to RCA, he is in the process of recording a new album of his own songs. **ARNOLD SHAW**

SONGWRITER SERIES

Cecil Null

There's a lot more than most people know about Cecil Null.

This we learned in an interview with Null during a lull in the first annual Smoky Mountain Folk Festival at Gatlinburg, Tenn., where he appeared late in May with his wife Annette.

Null is best known as a songwriter. His "I've Forgot More Than You'll Ever Know" has been recorded by at least 70 artists, with total record sales virtually inestimable. Songwriting remains the prime passion of this son of a West Virginia coal miner, chiefly because Null has lots he wants to say.

"I almost became a miner like my dad," Null said. "When I got out of the Navy after the war, I went to work beside my dad in the mines. Then one day it dawned on me that there I was with an education digging in the same mines where my dad, with no education, had worked for 44 years. I walked off the job that night and never went back."

Those mine experiences gave Null an affinity for the working man that tells in his songs. Recently he read of a strike by sharecroppers seeking a \$1-an-hour wage. He put aside the newspaper and wrote a song called "Tall Timberland," a lament of the Southern cotton picker.

"Johnny Cash is holding that song," Null said. "He wants to record it."

Null's social consciousness is colored red, white and blue, however. Another of his recent songs, "The War That's Not a War," is a patriotic statement about the unrest and riots in the U. S. It decries the "Hate parade that keeps marching here at home." Deejays have told Null the song is too volatile to

record at this time, "because it would get no airplay."

In the great country tradition, Null draws on the intimate agonies of human relationships for much of his song material. Such was the case with "I've Forgot More," which he dashed off in 30 minutes. (Null reads no music; sings and plays his compositions onto tape for delivery to an annotator.) Human foibles inspired one of Null's newest songs, which, he said, "I've pitched to Ernest Tubbs. In fact, I wrote it with him in mind. I frequently have a recording artist in mind as I write."

The song, called "Just Like I Expected Her to Do," is an unforgettable ballad about a man who picks up a girl in a bar and discovers she is a daughter he abandoned as a young child. The revelation comes with O Henry-like suddenness. The song is an excellent example of the modern, sophisticated country ballad form.

Null also penned a commentary on the assassination of John F. Kennedy. Entitled "Who Deserves the Blame?," the song caught the attention of Walter Winchell. But Null was urged not to have it recorded:

"We've been called folk-country artists," Null said, "but we're really country. Country music fits life. And so does our music."

Some of the artists who have recorded Null's songs are Tex Ritter, Archie Campbell, Jim Ed Brown, Johnny Cash, Brenda Lee, Anita Bryant, Johnny Wright, Kitty Wells, Vernon Oxford, Tennessee Ernie Ford, Patti Page and Bonnie Guitar.

Prolific as he is as a songwriter,

with some 200 published titles, Null is also active in virtually all other phases of the music business. Null:

- Is a Decca recording artist, with a recently released album of country gospel songs played on his electric autoharp. He is preparing a Christmas album of amplified autoharp music for Decca.

- Perfected and built the first amplified autoharp.

- Invented the Appalachian-style autoharp that is held in the arms and picked rather than laid on the lap and strummed.

- Developed the "picking" style of autoharp playing that has influenced autoharp players throughout the country. He also wrote the first text on this style, "The Cecil Null Picking Style for the Autoharp."

- Has just invented a new solid-body electric guitar shaped like a rifle. He calls it the "Gun-Tar." Vox and Ampeg have expressed interest.

- Has formed an independent production firm, Avenue South Records, in Hendersonville, Tenn. The firm has just finished some sides by Dick Barrett, a young vocalist and writer from Rockford, Ill.

- Founded two publishing firms, Can-Dan and Old Masters, both BMI. The houses have 12 records out, the newest a Jim Ed Brown performance of "Smaller Than the Bottle and Weaker Than the Wine."

- With his wife, is active in country and folk concerts, television appearances and is negotiating some fair dates.

Now, isn't that a lot more than you ever knew about Cecil Null?

RAY BRACK