

His voice has turned this ex-athlete into a big business; yet, at 24, he's too worried about the "precarious" future even to think about marriage

By ROBERT PEER

RECENTLY, Johnny Mathis' manager, Helen Noga, sat her client down with a battery of attorneys and accountants to fill him in on the various Mathis enterprises.

Mrs. Noga was pleased when she noticed that for the first time Johnny was taking an active interest in his finances; he was figuring with a pencil and paper as the conference progressed. Finally, his lawyer asked, "Johnny, do you have any idea how much money you're worth?"

"Oh, about \$50,000, I guess," replied Mathis.

"You're worth more than \$1 million," the attorney informed him.

The curious manager took another look at Johnny's "figures." They weren't calculations after all. Johnny had been working on a song arrangement throughout the get-together.

This doesn't mean Johnny's casual about success or money. Just the opposite. He's perpetually worried that the bonanza won't last, and his every waking moment is devoted to working for a more golden future. The way things are going for him now, it's hard to understand why this youthful overnight success should view every tomorrow as a personal enemy.

More than 20,000 Johnny Mathis records are sold every day. His growing legion of teen-age fans has carried a dozen tunes over the million mark.

Johnny has adult appeal, too, as indicated by his album sales. More than three-quarters of a million albums have been sold, an all-time sales mark, according to Columbia Records. He's in big demand for TV shows, too, and appears on Frances Langford's NBC special this evening (Sunday).

Moreover, Johnny has branched out to where he now owns five music publishing companies and two apartment houses in Manhattan. "And there's a lot of other jazz I can't think of right now," he adds.

Johnny's success results from three ingredients:

—His own talent—an exciting, pleasing voice.

—His constant self-analysis.

—Helen Noga, the manager who has guided his career since 1955.

Johnny gives Connie Cox, a San Francisco voice teacher, most of the credit for developing his talent. He always had an unusual voice with a phenomenal range for a male singer. His father, Clement Mathis, recognized this when Johnny was 13 and took him to Miss Cox.

"With seven children to support," Johnny recalls, "Dad couldn't afford to pay for lessons on his salary as a chauffeur and maintenance man, even with Mom helping out as a cook and maid."

But Miss Cox, whom Johnny calls a "wonderfully generous woman," recognized the great po-



THE MILLION-DOLLAR WOES OF JOHNNY MATHIS



tential in him and taught him without fee for seven years.

Johnny's first public fame came not as a singer but as a high jumper in high school, and again at San Francisco State College. One of the best all-around athletes in the city high-school system, Johnny also was an all-city basketball player.

He paid for his two years of college not with athletic scholarships, however, but with his voice. "I picked up a number of scholarships, most of them sponsored by women's clubs," Johnny recalls. "They were for about \$50 each, but together they paid for tuition, books, and other essentials."

Johnny had his mind set on becoming a physical-education instructor until the night in 1955 when he went to a San Francisco night club owned by Helen and George Noga and was asked to sing.

"When I heard him," says Helen, "I told my husband, 'This boy is going to be bigger than Nat King Cole. All he needs is a push.'" Helen has provided that push, parlaying him from \$75 a week into a million-dollar-a-year property.

Yet, at 24, Johnny is worried that it won't last. "I've already been at the top longer than my premonition told me I would," he declares. That's why Johnny has insured his future with an annuity that will pay him \$1 million when he's 40. And his publishing companies are potential Mathis gold mines. As Johnny explains it, "If I hadn't gone into music publishing, I'd only be collecting on my records. Now when somebody brings me a song and I record it, I sometimes publish it, too. Then I get the record royalties plus royalties from my own publishing houses."

JOHNNY'S preoccupation with self-analysis is another form of insurance against a cloudy future.

When I went to see him in his Spanish-type Beverly Hills mansion, for example, I found him listening intently to records—Mathis records.

He was hearing himself, not to please his ego, he told me, but to evaluate his own performance.

"I listen to myself to analyze my voice, my technique, and myself. When I'm not analyzing my own records, I do the same with other singers I like." This practice, Johnny feels, keeps him in the form necessary to stay on top longer.

Johnny says he was "sort of engaged" once but has no plans now for getting married. "Plenty of girls try to get next to me," Johnny says, "and some of them manage to meet me and we become good friends. But that's all, so far."

"Besides," says Johnny, the worrier, "I feel it's better for my career if I don't get married right away. When you deal with the public, you're always in a precarious position."