

Falstaff Of LP's Credits Success To Simplicity

By HUGH A. MULLIGAN
AP Newsfeatures Writer

The Falstaffian face of Mitch Miller, roaring musical mirth through his satirical beard, has become within the past two years the most familiar trade mark in the record business.

Not since the advent of the Smith Brothers has any facial adornment achieved such wide

product identification with the masses. Even Elvis Presley's side locks shrivel and shrink in comparison.

"Sing Along With Mitch Miller," "More Sing Along With Mitch," "Still More Sing Along With Mitch" and an endless procession of similar titles (13 in all) have established the beard and its wearer as the top album seller in the long playing field.

To date the "Sing Along" albums have sold more than 4½ million copies and racked up more than 20 million dollars for Columbia Records, and the end is nowhere in sight. Normally a long playing album is considered a hit if it sells 80,000 copies. For "Memories Sing Along With Mitch" and "March Along With Mitch," the latest additions to the line, 80,000 happens to be the first press run.

Virtually no one in the music business can give a clear explanation of Miller's singular success. There were sing-along records, even under the Columbia label, before he entered the field. There have been numerous imitators since, in endless variations ("Sing Along in Italian," "Western Sing Along," etc.), but none as successful.

Miller himself thinks his success is due to a happy blend of simplicity and perfection:

"The 25 singers who make up the gang are all top male choristers, but the arrangements they sing are carefully designed to suggest the informality of an amateur group. The style is 'home style,' simple chords with a simple musical background, like you might hear at a college reunion or in the twilight hours of a swinging party. There are no fancy frills, no hooped-up arrangements. It's kept simple enough for anyone to join in at any point, but always it's professional enough for folks to just sit back and listen."

The background instruments consist of a harmonica, accom-

dion, two ukuleles, a guitar, a snare drum and, surprisingly, no piano. "I ruled out the piano," Mitch explains, "because every time you have a piano player at a party, he starts getting fancy and people stop singing."

For his "Christmas Sing Along" album, Mitch added 13 girl choristers to his male aggregation and promptly was besieged with complaints from women. "They wrote in to say they didn't want women singing on the sing-along records. I don't know why. I guessed they missed the virile open sounds of the guys." Mitch was soothed by the knowledge that, despite the distaff complaints, the album still sold a half million copies and is back on the shelves for this Christmas shopping season.

The daily avalanche of mail suggested new oldies to include in the sing-along albums assures him that he will not run out of material in the very distant future.

"You know, we got into this almost by accident," he recalls. "Stan Kevin wanted to do an album of World War II songs. We got to thinking about it and decided why limit it to just a veteran's audience? So we threw in a lot of old songs, and from that time on we were rolling. Now more than half the songs used are suggested by people who write in."

From his mail, Mitch figures that his audience ranges from the pre-school set to octogenarians, from Boy Scouts to college professors, from—as recent letter revealed—an American couple stationed with the State Department in Somaliland to, as another let-

ter showed, a patient in a mental hospital who hadn't talked for 40 years until he one day began singing along with a Mitch Miller album being played over the hospital's loud speaker system.

But Mitch still can't understand why the albums sell even better in Canada than they do in the United States. "Maybe it's because Canada is more nostalgia-

minded, being largely an immigrant population as we once were. Or maybe it's because there's so many lakes up there and almost everyone can afford a summer cabin. Summer vacationers it seems are our very best customers, on both sides of the border. Get people away from the city and they just can't help singing," quote the beard.



Current Best Sellers

(Compiled by Publishers' Weekly)

NONFICTION
(Compiled by Publishers' Weekly)

NONFICTION
BORN FREE, Adamson.
THE WASTE MAKERS, Packard.
ENJOY! ENJOY! Golden.
HOW I MADE \$2,000,000 IN THE STOCK MARKET, Darvas.
THE POLITICS OF UP-HEAVAL, Schlesinger.

FICTION

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ADVISE AND CONSENT, Drury.
THE LEOPARD, di Lampedusa.
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By IRVING DESFOR
AP Newsfeatures

The Photokina 1960 in Cologne, Germany, shuttered its booths some time ago. Its many thousands of visitors have dispersed, but among them a couple of photo personalities left lasting impressions.

One of them is Man Ray and the other, Weegee.

Both are well known in photography inner circles as distinctive individuals with a flair for pointing a camera into uncharted channels. Both were born in the United States and are now living and working in Europe. Each had his own photo exhibition at Photokina and each made a personal appearance there to see the world show.

So much alike ... and so very different in appearance, dress and talk!

Man Ray celebrated his 70th birthday at the photo fair but his sprightly walk, careful grooming and agile mind belied the years. He recalled his photo beginning more than a half-century ago in California. His first camera was a homemade film-holder and box built around a projecting lens he had picked up. It could be used only for portraits with the subject riveted to a spot exactly 12 feet away.

"Exposure-coupled zoom lenses and automatic cameras have come a long way," he acknowledged as he passed the latest examples in the crowded aisles. "But it still takes imagination to make the pictures mean anything."

He proved that point 40 years ago with his photo innovations. At a time when large cameras and needle-sharp contact prints were the accepted vogue, he dabbled in enlargements, impressionistic and soft-focus portraits and in darkroom techniques like solarization. It created a controversy. He was taking the realism out of photography, it was argued.

But he showed realism has its drawbacks sometimes. His artistic photo of a nude figure was refused for exhibition. He took the negative, covered it with glass beads and made a print of the combination. The nude,

discreetly disguised through a crystal screen, was acceptable.

When French impressionistic painters startled the world with abstract art, Man Ray was photographing its counterpart in light patterns, close-up designs, slow exposure blurs and other fore-runners of abstract photography.

Today, despite somewhat failing vision, Man Ray still experiments in his Paris studio.

My knowledge of Weegee is more personal and goes back more than 30 years. At the time he was a darkroom printer for the newspaper syndicate in which I started to work. His real name, Arthur Fellig, was as unknown then as it is now. But as a character, everybody knew Weegee.

His trademark then, as now, is a black, chewed-up cigar, wild hair, probing eyes and a camera bag over a rumpled suit.

He did some remarkable photography of New York's unseen

night life of the early 30's — its seamy characters, murders, fires and society figures. It resulted in a book, "Naked City," and overnight fame. He went on to the West Coast where he spoofed the movie colony foibles in "Naked Hollywood."

Later he came up with an "elastic" lens which produced weird photo caricatures of world famous people and places. A group of these were on exhibition at Photokina and created a stir in the press and among the spectators.

Weegee toured the photo fair daily with a homemade contraption involving a child's kaleidoscope with a taped-on lens at one end. He assured me that this gadget would soon be in production as a photographic accessory for reflex cameras.

It was no joke — the results made with it were really unusual kaleidoscopic photo designs.



ADVANCE MAN: Man Ray, a pioneer in many of the techniques of modern photography, poses in front of a self-portrait he made in 1929. The revealing comparison was snapped at Photokina 1960 by Heinz Leifermann of The Overseas Weekly.