

# The Tennessean

## Trio of country songwriters land on dance floor with 'Fall'

BY CINDY WATTS • STAFF WRITER • August 10, 2008

The last place a country songwriter generally expects to land is on the dance charts. But that's exactly where hit songsmith Sonny LeMaire found his song "Fall" a few weeks ago.



**(Photo: Sonny LeMaire performed with country group Exile from 1977-1994.)**

LeMaire, Shane Minor and Clay Mills co-wrote the ballad that Clay Walker initially made into a Top 5 country hit. Kimberly Locke later recorded the same song as an adult-contemporary pop tune and landed LeMaire and Co. heir first No. 1 dance hit.

The song wasn't the trio's first chart-topper. They also wrote Andy Griggs' No. 5 hit "She Thinks She Needs Me" and Diamond Rio's No. 1 "Beautiful Mess."

"Fall" marks the 13th No. 1 hit for LeMaire, who performed with country group Exile from 1977-1994. He penned chart-toppers for that band, too, including "She's a Miracle" and "Crazy for Your Love."

That version of Exile called it quits in the mid-'90s, but today LeMaire and the band are playing together again. He also has a trio with "Fall" partner Clay Mills and fellow songwriter Mark Selby; the three play their hits and write new material to perform together.

**How did you feel about "Fall" after it was complete?**

Back when we finished "Beautiful Mess," we knew we felt really good about the song. It's the same with this song. It laid around for a while and was pitched, and nothing happened for a few years. That was probably five years ago.

My publishing company pitched the song to (Clay Walker's producer Keith Stegall), and he loved it. They eventually cut the song, and I can remember seeing pitch sheets later saying Clay was looking for songs. When that happens you're thinking, 'Oh man, is our song even going to make it?'

Eventually we got the word that it had made the project. I got to tell you, I was amazed at his vocal on the song. I thought, 'My God, he killed this thing.'

### **So how did the song get transformed from a country love ballad to a dance hit?**

It's bizarre. I'm thrilled to death. It was released adult contemporary and then it goes No. 1 on a dance chart? How does that happen? . . .

I'm kind of speechless at this point about stuff like that. . . . To me it's remarkable that people can take a country song and make them real edgy, do things to them. It's flattering in a way. But the dance thing, that's technology at work. I'm OK with that. It's funny.

### **When did the Exile reunion start to take shape?**

An old road manager was in a severe accident and one of my friends and I started talking about how to raise money to help. I thought, 'Is it even possible to get the original guys back together? By original, I mean the lineup that had the most commercial success — Les Taylor, J.P. Pennington, Steve Goetzman, Marlon Hargis and myself.

So I contacted everyone and they agreed. That was in January and the show happened on St. Patrick's Day. . . .

For the longest, longest time I never thought I'd get back playing with the band again. But enough time had gone by, and it was a worthy cause that prompted it, and at this stage in my life and I guess in the guys' lives, too, it just feels good. You're not worried about record companies and the politics of it. It's literally going out and playing music for fun, and it feels great to do that. Where it will lead, I don't know. We hope it leads to more shows, but time will tell.

### **Where does your trio fit in?**

It's real eclectic. It's got bits of blues, country and rock 'n' roll. When we set out to start this thing we wanted to write some cool music (without worrying) about getting pigeonholed into writing just for country. We wanted to write songs however they fell out. It's just so darn much fun.

Reach Cindy Watts at 615-664-2227 or [ciwatts@tennessean.com](mailto:ciwatts@tennessean.com).