260 days a year traveling; music 'every waking hour'

If Ronnie Milsap could see, he'd have been disappointed with the dressing room in G. Rollie White.

Three old chairs, formica floor and nothing to drink.

But more media persons than last year's performance here meant more space than his bus could provide.

Milsap said he has to pace himself while on the road and although it's nothing like home, he enjoys traveling and meeting people.

He must enjoy it. He said he's been on the road about 260 days this year.

Tuesday night's performance was Milsap's last for this year. "We couldn't end up on a better note," he said. "This school spirit here is outta sight."

Milsap said his road to popularity was a long one.

"My musical ability was revealed after testing at the State School for the Blind in Raleigh, N.C., when I was 6 years old," he said, chuckling. "They decided I was going to learn to play the violin so they stuck me in that class."

Milsap endured a classical education in music at the school, learning to play piano and all the string and reed instruments.

However, this didn't stop his interest in country music, rock-and-roll and blues.

"This was the time of Elvis, Lefty Frizzel and other rock and roll stars," he explained. "It was the popular thing. We used to listen to the radio and imitate them."

But the teachers didn't approve and he was suspended for a year from the school's music department, for pounding out rock-and-roll once too often.

Significantly, his music became less important when he enrolled in pre-law courses at Atlanta's Young-Harris Junior College. His scholastic performance there led to a full scholarship at Emory University's Law School.

"I was being persuaded to go to law school," Milsap said. "I decided I loved music more than law and I didn't go there."

He met Joyce, his wife-to-be, at this time. They now have a six-year-old son, Todd.

Milsap said he and his wife hit it off well from the start. "My blindness didn't cause any problems for us," he said.

"I've always known that if I was sensitive about being blind, then other people would be sensitive about it too.

"I have never been able to see anything — no light perception whatsoever. It is easier on me than for someone who lost their vision."

Milsap accepts his blindness stoically and even jokes about it during his concerts.

In the future, Milsap said, he plans to use more amplified instruments, and without losing his country audience, he wants to have a wider appeal.

"I don't want to be known as strictly a country star," said Milsap. "Country, rock and pop and all that — I just like to see it called music. In England, they have a big top 50 and if you make it they don't say 'this is Ronnie Milsap, he's in the top 10 and he's a country star.' You're in there just because of the music value."

At home he spends time with his son, who is more interested in sports than music.

When he isn't with Todd, he enjoys ham radio, and with the help of a special rail behind the foul line, he averages 160 at bowling.

But he doesn't have much time for his hobbies. "If you're in music," Milsap said, "you're in it every waking hour that you have."

Milsap: C&W plus . . .

By STEVE MAYER

Throwing balls and frisbees, wearing a grotesque mask, setting off flares and bombs and playing a piano synthesizer do not a country and western star make.

Well then, maybe Ronnie Milsap isn't just C&W.

He had the Aggies screaming and standing Tuesday night while he proved he can entertain with more than his voice.

Review

Before the concert, I thought of last year's. Anyone who listened to the "Ronnie Milsap Live" album knew exactly which songs would be played, in which sequence, and could tell Milsap's jokes before he did.

If last year's concert was exactly like the "Live" album, how would it be this time?

It would be a *great* time. Oh sure, two or three jokes were repeats. Like a band member telling Milsap there were 20 feet to the edge of the stage, when in fact there were only two.

Milsap, with his powerful voice, control over the piano and rapport with the audience, brought the Town Hall crowd to its feet more than once.

They heard "Pure Love," "(I'm a) Stand By My Woman Man" and his biggest hit, "It Was Almost Like A Song." Most of the songs were country, but he added a pop-music touch to some, and a piano synthesizer to others. Steve Holt, the drummer, joked with Milsap about the wild noises the synthesizer produced. "Don't you ever feed that thing?" he asked.

Milsap's singing and piano-playing imitations of Elvis Presley, Fats Domino, The Platters and Jerry Lee Lewis were new this year, and simply helped demonstrate the talents of the Country Music Association's Entertainer of the Year for 1977. The Lewis imitation involved Milsap's jumping, unassisted, onto the piano.

The biggest reaction of the night came when he took off his sequined shirt to reveal a t-shirt which read, "Beat the hell outta t.u." The crowd stood for 10 minutes, bringing Milsap back for two encores.

Asleep At The Wheel, which played before Milsap, started out un-enthused.

The western-swing band's only expressions were occasional quirk smiles to each other. It's not that "Route 66," "Texas, You and Me" and "Miles and Miles of Texas" were not entertaining, rather the effort put into them made me wonder if the performers could care any less.

Some fast-fiddling in "Take Me Back To Tulsa" and antics in "Bump, Bounce, Boogie" brought good response from the crowd. Asleep At The Wheel finally had fun with the songs, and that made the rest of their performance fun for the audience.

Firefall plays A&M concert

Firefall, a rock group, will present a concert sponsored by Town Hall at G. Rollie White Coliseum, Dec. 2, at 8 p.m.

The term distinctive sound is used to define the group's music which combines aggressiveness and gentle serenity. Their hit song, "Just Remember I Love You," displays this unique combination with tremendous degree of serious musicianship.

The group of men composing Firefall is not new to the music business, but can trace their histories back to earlier rock 'n' roll bands. Rick Roberts, writer-vocalist-guitarist, is formerly of the Burrito Brothers. Mark Andes, the group's bass guitarist, was a member of Spirit and JoJo Gunne.

Former member of Zephyr, Jock Bartley, plays the lead guitar. Larry Burnett, writer-vocalist-guitarist, provides many of the smooth, flowing touches to the group's music. Drummer Michael Clarke is formerly of the Byrds. The sixth member is David Muse who contributes the sounds of keyboards and horns.

The first act will be Sanford Townsend Band. Ticket prices for A&M students are general admission, free with ticket, and reserved, $4. Non-A&M student dates are general admission, $3, and reserved $4. General public prices are general admission, $4, and reserved $6. Additional information and tickets can be obtained at the MSC Box Office, 845-2916.

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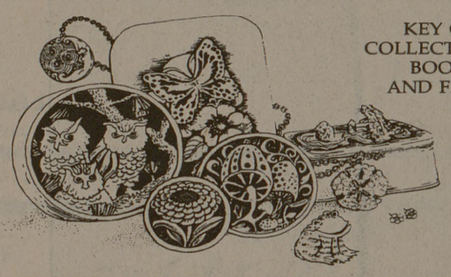
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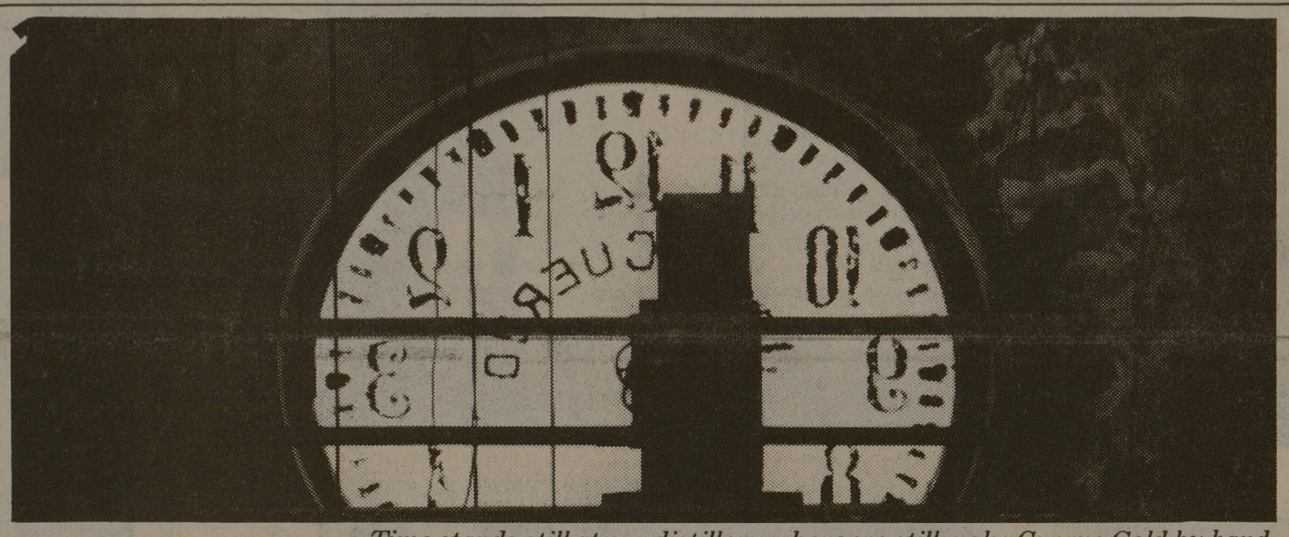
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