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Bob and Marty York

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Bob and Marty York

Bob York is "a down-home traditional country musician," according to his son, Marty. Marty York, on the other hand, "is a kind of pop country musician," according to his father, Bob. These two Kentucky musicians have learned, over the years, to accept each others styles of music, which on paper are strikingly similar, but in reality are markedly different. Their repertoires consist of many of the same songs, but the different ways in which they play these songs produces a completely different atmosphere and feeling about the music.

Bob York appears to be typical of traditional Kentucky musicians. At the age of 10, in 1939, he was taught to play the guitar by his mother, Nora York. "I can remember my mother playing the guitar ever since I was a small child. We would come in from chores, we lived on a farm, and after supper Mother would play nice soft music on her guitar to try to calm me down for bed." He later learned to play the guitar from his mother, and he says the music created a bond between them because they could then communicate with each other without ever saying a word.

Bob was the only one in his immediate family "who took a shine to music," as he puts it. "Mother didn't

sing much, she just played her music, so I decided it was time to put some words to her music. It was mostly silly little songs about school and the farm, but I guess that's when I really started enjoying music; when I had a part in creating it."

He played off and on until he got married to his wife, Helen, and had children of his own, and then he increased his playing in the hopes that one of his children would also be interested in music. It was at this time that he was most deeply involved in music. "I began to write more songs and I learned to play some new instruments- the banjo and the fiddle. I listened to the Grand Old Opry every chance I got because I loved their style of real country music and it gave me the inspiration to keep on playing right here in Sadieville, Kentucky."

Bob was so impressed with the popularity of those musicians that he thought he would give it a try himself, and record some of his own music. He paid to have two of his songs pressed into a single ("If You Ain't a Pussycat," and "Chains of Love.") "That's the total of my professional music career. The recording wasn't very good, and I gave most of the copies to my friends and neighbors."

It was around this time that Bob taught his son, Marty, to play the guitar. Marty remembers, "when I was about eight years old my dad started teaching me how to play. I was the only one of the five kids who was

interested in music. In fact I loved music, any kind of music, and I was ready to learn everything I could about it." Marty kept on playing his fathers music, but also learned about other musics. He joined the Jr. High band and learned how to play the trumpet and how to read music, "and as the years went on I kept on learning how to play new instruments - trombone, piano, drums, french horn, banjo, and fiddle."

During high school and right after high school, Marty was influenced by the surge in rock music and he formed a rock band ^{and} played lead electric guitar and sang lead vocals. After playing for a few years in the clubs in Lexington, Marty found his heart wasn't really into playing rock music. His father says of this period, "Marty was an excellent musician and I was thrilled at the thought of his devotion to music, but I hated that loud junk music he was playing."

Marty soon returned to his country roots of music. He began playing some of his fathers original songs, after he disbanded his rock band. "I really liked the words and the meanings of the songs, but I just couldn't handle the real twangy country sound, so I kept the words and changed the music. Needless to say, Dad wasn't real happy about me changing around his songs."

Bob described this period in his sons musical career in the following way, "It was better than playing rock

music, but I hated the thought of him changing the music to my songs. He got rid of the real country feel of the music and gave it an upbeat pop-country feel. We had many disagreements about the changes and it took me a long time to accept the fact that he wasn't going to play music my way. I finally accepted it when I realized that his style of music meant as much to him as my style of music meant to me."

Marty bought a synthesizer and used it for a percussion and chord background for his guitar, banjo, and fiddle playing. This time he played the country music circuit in Lexington. Of his father's attitude at this time he said, "I thought Dad would be thrilled at the thought of his songs being played every night for audiences, but he wasn't. I guess he thought the music wasn't really his any more after I changed the music. We didn't get along well for quite some time because of the music. It was really hard because it was music that made us so close, and now it was that same music that was tearing us apart. He came around after a while, though, after he realized I was going to play the way I wanted to."

Bob then began to support his son's career by helping him get local press coverage and by helping him enter contests. His biggest push came when he helped Marty get a recording contract with Epic Records to do a single,

with two of the songs Bob had written ("Even Though", and "Billygate", a spoof on Billy Carter.) Bob said, "I was absolutely thrilled the first time I heard my son and my song on the radio. It sort of made up for the success I dreamed of in the Opry Days."

The record was not a success, but Marty thought it was a good start. He kept plugging away with the hopes that he would soon get his break. He entered many talent shows hoping for exposure, the most recent and important being the "You can Be a Star" show organized by Bill Anderson, and shown on Public Television. He did not win, however he was noticed by PeeWee King who set Marty up for a recording contract with Bill Walker in Nashville. In his contract he recorded two of his fathers songs- "Even Though" and "Forever Yours"; and several of his own songs including "Hills of Kentucky", "Be Thankful", and "Love Me."

Marty is currently playing at Sigee's Bar at the Harley Hotel in Lexington, where he has been for the past six years. A typical show includes his songs, his father's songs, popular artists songs (like Lee Greenwood and Alabama) and the old standards like "Rocky Top" and "Salty Dog". He alternates from his main instrument of guitar to banjo and fiddle throughout the night.

Bob goes to see his son perform regularly and often

ends up playing a few songs with his son during the night. Bob says of the experience, "It's a lot of fun to be up there on stage and it feels good to get the encouragement that the audience gives you, but, to tell you the truth I'd rather be sitting in my living room playing for myself and my wife."

Both men appear to have accepted each others musics. Bob sometimes plays Martys style at the club, and during family get-togethers Marty plays Bob's style. Though each has his own way of playing basically the same songs, each is comfortable with the others style.

It will be interesting to see what the next York generation will do with music. Will Bobs songs then take on a punk flair?