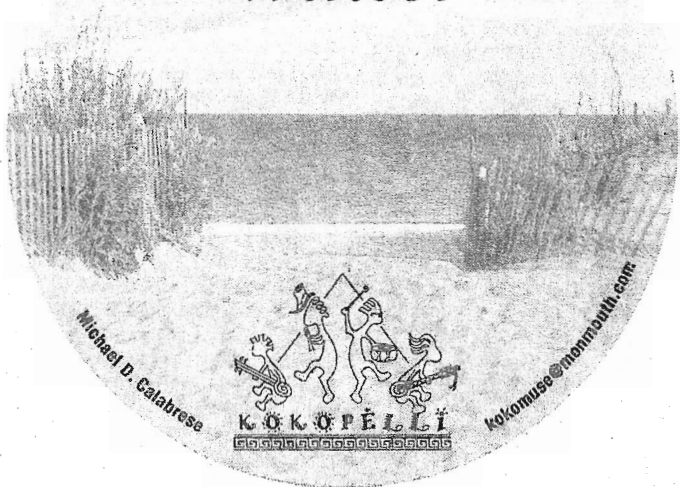


Taboo Records, Inc.
Presents

Kokopelli Winter



The cover of Michael Calabrese's CD "Winter." File photo

SEASONAL SONGS OPEN DOORS

RADIO SOMEWHERE

By MAUREEN NEVIN DUFFY
Correspondent

Hit songs can soar to the top of the charts and fade just as fast. But mention "The Chipmunk Song" and everyone remembers that obnoxious yell, "Hey, Alvinnnnn!"

"Grandma Got Run Over by a Reindeer," the Randy Brooks song about a tipsy octogenarian who overdoes the egg nog, fills the airways right through New Year's Day. For their makers, novelty songs are the holiday gift that keeps on giving.

Originally performed by husband-and-wife duo Elmo and Patsy Shropshire, "Grandma" sold nearly half a million copies, according to Wikipedia. Yes, Virginia, seasonal songs sell. They also can open doors for new musicians trying to get noticed by local stations.

And holiday songs don't have to assault the senses to succeed. Michael Calabrese of Tinton Falls wrote and produced a nice Christmas recording. To his surprise, Calabrese learned that new Christmas songs are few and far between.

"Winter," produced in 2000, has received local airplay every season since it hit the air in 2002

"There's a certain consistency with a seasonal song," he says. "I hear people playing it every Christmas."

"It's an awesome song," says Jimmy Steal, an on-air personality for WRAT-FM/The Rat (95.9), who often played "Winter" on the "Jersey Rock Week Nights Show," now hosted by Steve Hook.

After making "Winter," Calabrese and singer Tom Connelly, his former partner in the band Kokopelli, released a full-length CD called "Audio Canvas" in 2002.

"Winter" has a melancholy tone and an opening that immediately establishes the local setting. Surf and seagull sounds convey a barren beach under a cold winter sky. The opening line — "Well it's snowing down in this Asbury town, again" — is the only mention of the town by name, but references to Sal-

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vation Army bells and the grinding poverty of a wind-swept, deserted, out-of-season resort plays nicely with the parallel theme of emptiness over an estranged lover and the singer's own salvation.

"A Christmas song is special," says Calabrese. "It's got to pull on the heart strings and draw you in. Asbury Park is a very cold and windy place at wintertime, completely different than in summer. That's why we chose it. The song tries to capture the sounds of that town sleeping in winter."

The holiday play of "Winter" did the trick in drawing attention to "Audio Canvas," which was selling at the time in all 10 Compact Disc World outlets. (Compact Disc World has since closed its doors.)

"Sales definitely go up during the holidays," says Calabrese.

These days, Calabrese performs original works with local artists at The Saint in Asbury Park and on originals' nights at The Stone Pony in Asbury Park, as well as the Internet Cafe and Chubby's, both in Red Bank. Middletown-based singer/songwriter/guitarist Christrina Signorelli, who currently is shopping her own music to major labels, will be pairing up with Calabrese after the holidays for gigs at The Cutting Room in Manhattan as well as the aforementioned venues.

Between the gigs and teaching music to about 60 kids at Monmouth Music in Red Bank and the Custom Shop in Colts Neck, Calabrese shops his music. He distributes roughly 400 free copies of his music a year to music stores and radio stations.

It was through a call from Albert Rescinnio, a lawyer and the brother of his manager, that Calabrese got The Rat interested in "Winter." But Calabrese still had to follow up with a meeting with the jocks to talk about his music and seal the deal. Contacts are important, he says, because these DJs get hundreds of records from people asking you to play them.

"Another thing that helps get airplay is 'authentic' phone calls," says Calabrese. Due to the limited listening area, even 20 calls from people requesting a song can make a huge difference.

"I've got nothing but thanks for the guys at The Rat," says Calabrese. "It's great having a song on local radio. People say, 'Oh man, you're the guy who wrote that? That's really cool!'"

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