

SHOWCASE

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Murphy keeps singer-songwriter tradition alive

By KARLA TIPTON
Assistant Showcase Editor

New York singer-songwriter Elliott Murphy has not visited California since 1976.

"In those 13 years, I've probably been to Europe 30 times," said Murphy in a phone interview, discussing his solo appearance tonight at McCabe's in Santa Monica.

Murphy — whose first state-side album *Aquashow* (1973) was re-released on CD by Polydor last year — sells far more records in Europe than in his own country. While his 1987 album *Milwaukee* sold only 6,500 copies in the United States, it sold 70,000 overseas.

He visits Europe more often because most of his fans are there. However, the reasons behind his popularity across the Atlantic are more complex.

One explanation may be that "in France, in particular, they have a tradition of singer-songwriters that goes back before rock'n'roll — people who wrote very personal songs and sang them with a great deal of emotion," said Murphy. "In America, there certainly has been a time when 'singer-songwriter' was a dirty word."

For Murphy, that time came

Rock

after his 1977 Columbia album *Just a Story in America* was released. The LP followed up two records on RCA (*Lost Generation*, *Night Lights*), which received acclaim by critics tagging him as "the new Dylan" and some U.S. airplay on album-oriented rock radio stations. But his thoughtful, sometimes quiet sentiments ranging from the importance of a rock ballad to comments on historical figures such as Russian princess Anastasia got lost amidst the thump-thumpa of disco and the howl of punk.

Through it all, Murphy never

gave up on lyrical artistry. "My best and my worst quality is persistence. I refuse to give up and I never know when to give up." His most recent album *Change Will Come*, reflects this. However, his tone has shifted from idealism to realism. His topics range from the cycle of alcohol and drug abuse which is passed down through the generations ("Chain of Pain") to the repetition of actions that have lost their meaning ("And That's Called Insanity").

Yet compared to his lyrics from a decade earlier, his tone is less subjective. "I think my songs may be somewhat less personal than they were in the beginning," he said.

Still his lyrics are a far cry

from most popular music, which is "geared toward the 16-year-old record buyer. Whether the music industry gave up on the older, more sophisticated record buyer or whether they gave up on the music, I don't know," said Murphy.

The poetic era of rock had ended.

This shift of emphasis in rock is one subject that comes up in "Cold and Electric," Murphy's novel about a disillusioned musician named Marty May. Based on a series of short stories, the first of which appeared in *Rolling Stone* in 1980, the book (translated into French and Spanish) will be published in Europe in October.

Like his character, Murphy, too, is somewhat disillusioned with what rock has become.

"I think the spirit of rock'n'roll is dead," said Murphy. "I think there're some people making fantastic music and putting on great shows, but I think that basic spirit where rock'n'roll became your way of life exclusive of other ways of life . . . It's no longer the same."

Elliott Murphy

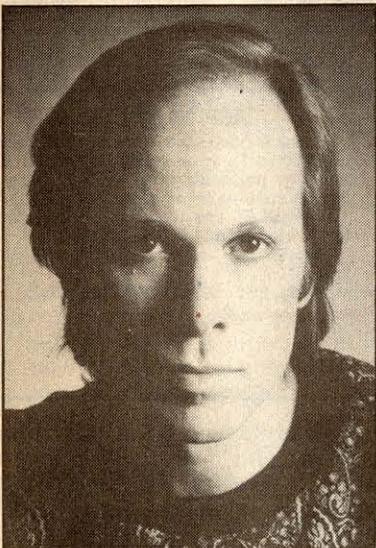
In his first California appearance in 13 years, this New York-based singer-songwriter will perform a selection of songs from his 10 albums recorded over the course of 16 years.

WHERE: McCabe's, 3101 Pico Blvd., Santa Monica.

WHEN: 8 p.m. today.

TICKETS: \$12.50.

INFORMATION: (213) 828-8037.



ELLIOTT MURPHY