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MAY 1/74

May 1-74 117

Keith Thom: the artist is 'pushy'

Peel County, Bly, Pg 9

By JOHN STEWART

"I'll do all types of music. I'll even play cocktail hour for a bunch of drunk businessmen."

Even making allowances for the dramatic effect he was trying to conjure, the statement from 19-year-old Keith Thom had to be suspect.

Could this young singer-guitarist, sporting a beard and long hair and telling you about his musical roots in folk-country actually be serious about providing background muzak for the March of the Martinis?

The answer, soon to be clarified, was a resounding yes.

For if there is one thing Keith Thom cannot exaggerate about, it is how much he would like to succeed in the music business.

The Clarkson born and raised singer appeared Saturday night on CBLT's All About Toronto and sang Jim Croce's "Time In A Bottle."

Thom earned the coveted opportunity for Toronto TV exposure by hounding the show's producer, Bob Givens of Mississauga, constantly for a month and a half for the chance.

The appearance meant Thom joined the musician's union. Now he hopes to start pushing the CBC for more opportunities. If that means pestering Juliette or Tommy Hunter for a chance to perform on their shows, then that's what Keith will be doing.

He has already been promised a demonstration tape of the All About Toronto show which he will flog around the city, along with letters of reference. Then come 100 letters to TV, radio and record people and follow-up telephone calls.

It's all part of Keith's pragmatic pop philosophy. "I survived a year in Europe just singing," he says. "It

may sound conceited but I know I'm good enough. Lots of people had the opportunity to be on this show but they didn't push. No one took it up, but I did. You just have to have self-confidence in your product — which is you."

There's no tone of self-inflation when Thom makes that point. It's all part of the business, as far as he is concerned.

"You go to talk to people who have the money and the influence," relates the singer matter-of-factly. "You see the people who can do something for you. You don't fiddle around with the small people."

Keith, who began playing a guitar six years ago when an elder brother abandoned it, accepts the element of compromise which resulted in the arbitrary selection of "Time In A Bottle" as his TV number rather than one of his own 40-odd compositions. He believes the impression on the audience will be more favourable if he does a good job with a familiar, commercial tune.

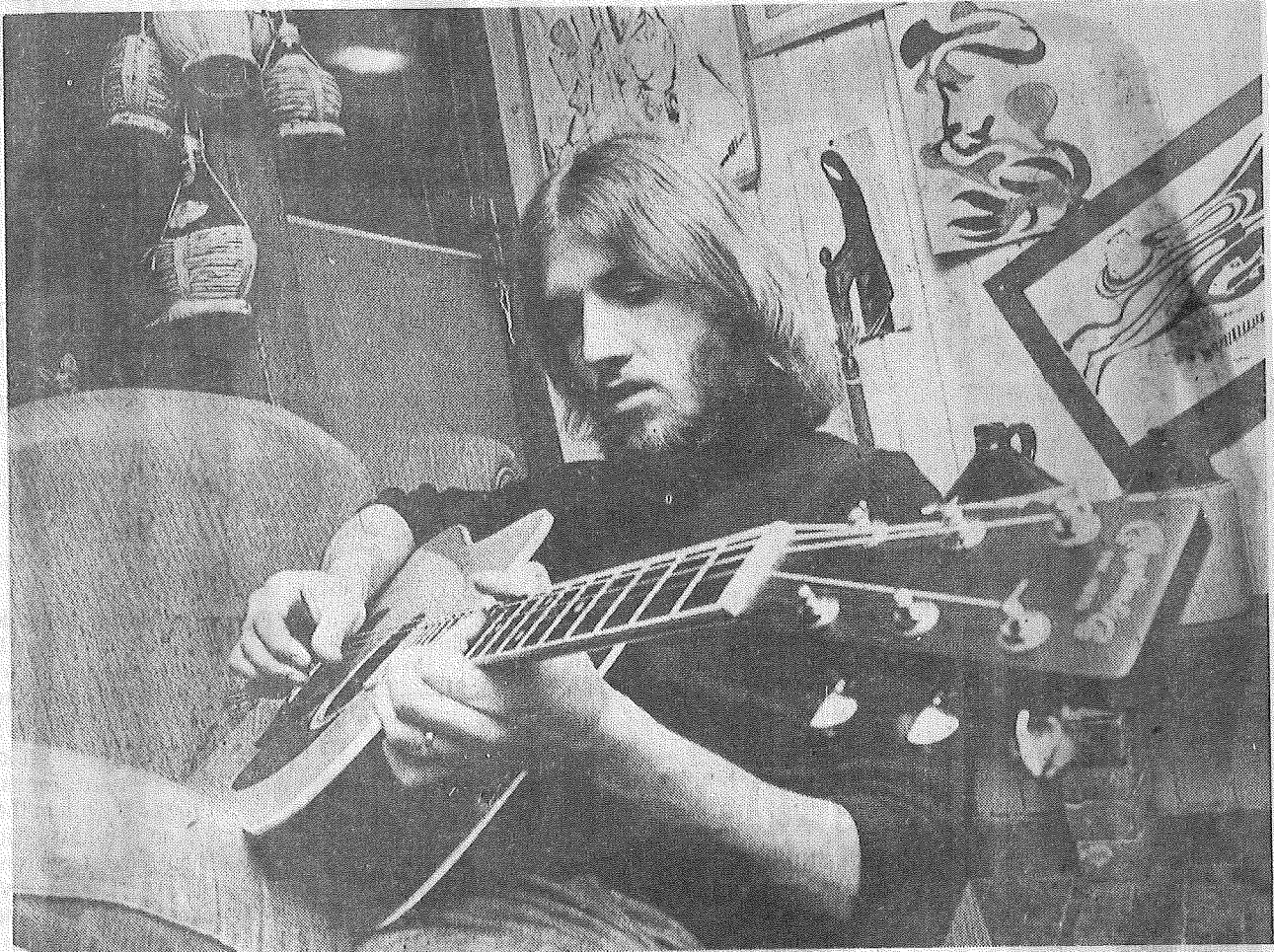
Thom went to Europe for two weeks last year and ended up staying for a year. He performed virtually every night, improving in his own estimation 200 per cent. He worked nightclubs in Spain and the surrounding area for six months and gave concerts in Holland. A single released in Holland was number five on the local hit parade for three weeks.

"I was floored," says Thom. "You're not subjected here to all the things, the situations and the people you meet over there. It took me months to adjust."

The singer claims he's not really concerned with instant success. "I'll be satisfied as long as I can make a living out of making music."

But it's obvious that Keith Thom expects to do much more than just make a living with his music.

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Keith Thom relaxes in his Clarkson Road South home. The aggressive young folksinger will even play "for a

bunch of drunken businessmen" to get exposure. (Times photo by Ray Saltz).