

Country artist Sharp has new tack



By Phyllis Stark

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Kevin Sharp came out of the gate swinging. His debut album on 143/Asylum Records, released in 1996, went gold. The first three of his six charting singles went top five, including "Nobody Knows," which spent four weeks at No. 1 on the Billboard Hot Country Songs chart in 1997.

Then, after two albums, Sharp seemed to disappear from the country music scene.

His record label folded, and he was shifted to sister label Warner Bros. Records, where he says he sat around for a year and a half before extricating himself from his contract when it became clear "nothing was happening."

Now, the 34-year-old is trying to stage a comeback on the tiny Nashville independent label Cupit Records. Sharp's first album for that label, "Make a Wish," was released July 26. He has also published a book, "Tragedy's Gift," detailing the teenage battle with cancer that ultimately led him to a music career.

Sharp says he has had a hard time explaining just where he has been to fans who don't understand the music business.

"I never went anywhere," he says. "I was still making music and writing songs. It's just that nobody got to hear it.

"After a label closes, your life kind of gets turned upside down," he continues. "With all the different changes going on in Nashville in the last several years, I got caught within that vicious cycle. It's taken me this long to find a place to land."

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Sharp is glad to be on an independent label, but not for the "artistic freedom" reasons most artists cite when they move from a major.

He says producer Jerry Cupit helped him rediscover the joy of making music in the studio. "I didn't have a very pleasurable experience with the last record I made, mainly in the creative process," he says. What he wanted this time was "more than anything not (to be) lied to."

Sharp says recording "Make a Wish" was so pleasurable that it restored a lot of his hope and faith in the business.

"I hear guys talking about fighting for their creative rights, and I don't want to sound like one of those guys," he says. "It's more about wanting to enjoy the process than about me wanting to have control."

"Make a Wish" includes 10 new songs, a remake of "Nobody Knows" and 11 bonus tracks containing the album's music without vocals.

The new album's title track was included on a Walt Disney Records compilation CD that was released in May as a fund-raiser for the Make-a-Wish Foundation. Sharp is a national spokesman for the group, which grants wishes for ill children.

He is in good company on the compilation, "Walt Disney Presents Wishes," which also features tracks from Elton John, James Taylor, Bette Midler and Barbra Streisand.

Since Sharp is also a motivational speaker, he works his music into his many speaking engagements, and he loves that aspect of his professional life.

"Unlike playing in a club (for) a bunch of drunks," he says, "people hear every lyric and every word I say."

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