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After 27 Years, Country Remains Hooked On 'Fishin' In The Dark'



It's a song that's as much about seduction as it is about night fishing. Filled with evocative imagery conjuring moonlight, lightning bugs and counting the stars, "Fishin' in the Dark" has quietly become one of the most influential songs of the last quarter-plus century, having been referenced countless times in the lyrics of other country songs and covered by multiple artists.

Written by **Jim Photoglo** and **Wendy Waldman**, "Fishin' in the Dark" became the third No. 1 for the **Nitty Gritty Dirt Band** in 1987 and hasn't left the airwaves since. The original version got 94 spins at 47 reporting stations during the last tracking week (July 28 to Aug. 3). That translates to 635,000 audience impressions, which would put it at No. 57 on the Aug. 16 Country Airplay chart if it were a current. But it has also found a second life with other performers.

Many country artists, including **Kenny Chesney**, have included it in their live shows. It has also been recorded by numerous acts including **Emerson Drive** and Photoglo himself. Arista Nashville's **Swon Brothers** sang it on season four of *The Voice* and put their version on iTunes. **Garth Brooks** has recorded it twice: once for his 2005 *The Lost Sessions* album, and again for last year's boxed set, *Blame It All on My Roots: Five Decades of Influences*.

Brooks, who scored front row tickets to see the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band while he was in college, tells *Billboard Country Update*, "The Dirt Band goes way beyond genre. Their influence has reached the greatest bands and artists in music history. Their legacy is over 40 years old and will live forever... 'Fishin' in the Dark' is just one of many great songs that the Dirt Band has breathed life into. They are what music and performing are all about."

The song's title has also served as a lyrical touch point for many other country songs. Some recent examples are Mercury artist **Canaan Smith's** current single, "Love You Like That"; **Miranda Lambert's** "Sunday in the South," an album cut from her new *Platinum* set; **Chris Young's** "Lost" from his *Neon* album; and **Ashton Shepherd's** "Rory's Radio," from *Where Country Grows*.

Referencing the song title and band in his own lyrics, Smith says, was "the best way to sum up a country boy's lifestyle in eight words." He calls the original "a timeless song" that has resonated with many people. Its message offered "such an original way of saying, 'Hey, let's go kill some time together.' Nobody had ever heard it done that way," adds Smith. "Things that are original, first of their kind, seem to be timeless, and that was definitely a first of its kind."

Photoglo, who just released his new album *Halls of My Heart* last month, remembers writing the music for what became "Fishin'" at the Shoney's Inn that was once located at the base of Music Row. Waldman had been listening to *A Prairie Home Companion* on the radio and had the idea to write a song about fishing. "My first reaction was to run away screaming," says Photoglo with a laugh. "But I trusted her, so we knocked it about and ... essentially used the music I had recorded at Shoney's and [added] lyrics."

He admits, "It's a seduction song," but says it also was meant to capture "the feeling of the way the summer is in the South where it's humid and warm, and you look for a comfortable place to get cool."

Producer **Josh Leo**, who had just been offered the job to helm the Dirt Band's next album, heard the song during a party at Waldman's house. As Photoglo recalls, "He said, 'I've got a real strong feeling about this. Please let me play this for the band,' and the rest is history."

While Photoglo is proud of the song, he says it's the recording that really elevated it, noting that the band, Leo and the engineer "captured lightning in a bottle. They captured what people feel is a good song and made an amazing record. It's beautifully produced, and it still sounds current all these years later."

But even Photoglo, who says "Fishin'" has "been an incredible blessing in my life," couldn't have predicted its lasting legacy.

"It's always a surprise to me," he says of all the cover versions and lyrical references, "and I'm forever grateful." ●



PHOTOGLO

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