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Chain reaction aids hero's kin

By Joe Edwards

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) -- When Harry Nilsson made an informal recording in Hollywood in 1960, he had no idea the material would benefit the family of the late actor and World War II hero Audie Murphy 17 years later.

Thanks to the generosity of Nilsson and the thoughtfulness of Nashville record producer Scotty Turner, proceeds from the current album "Nilsson: Early Tymes" will go to Murphy's widow and two sons.

Nilsson agreed to release the previously unused material out of respect for Turner, who got him started recording. Turner, in turn, wants to help out the Murphy family because he and Murphy were close friends before Murphy died in a 1971 plane crash near Roanoke, Va.

"This shows Harry Nilsson is a superstar in his heart as well as in music," Turner said.

Although Murphy was a successful actor as well as a songwriter, his estate is tied up in litigation. So Turner particularly wants to help Murphy's elder son, Terry, 25, who aspires to be a singer or songwriter.

"IF YOU CAN'T help out your best friend's son, you're not too good of a person," said Turner, who has produced more than 70 acts in his 20 year career.

Murphy and Turner wrote 18 songs together, including "Shutters and Boards, recorded by Jerry Wallace and Dean Martin, and "When the Wind Blows in Chicago," recorded by Roy Clark.

"Audie couldn't carry a tune in a bucket but he was a magician with words," Turner said.

They were such close friends that Murphy was godfather to Turner's daughter and gave Turner some of his war medals. "He wasn't pompous," Turner said. "He never claimed he was a great actor and didn't like to watch his own pictures."

Nilsson, who was 17 when the album was recorded, met Turner in Los Angeles just before the informal recording session.

I WAS HANGING AROUND a publisher's office and there was a kid there with a guitar between his knees," Turner recalled. "He said he sang and wrote, so we went into a music room and he was the best I'd ever heard."

Turner later took him to various music companies. Nine years later, after winning a Grammy Award for "Everybody's Talkin'," Nilsson wrote to Turner; "I owe you my beginning."

Then two years ago, the unused tapes turned up from Nilsson's 1960 recording session - his first. Turner asked for, and received, authority to release the voice track with the addition of some finishing instrumentation and background voices.

"Last week I was home and the phone rang and it was Harry," Turner said. "He said he'd just received the album and it was incredible."

The album has received favorable reviews from the trade magazines. The single to be released from the album is "Please Mr. Music Man," written by Turner and Murphy.

"I don't feel anybody owes me a debt, but Harry Nilsson has just paid 'em all," Turner said.