

The Ballad of Murder Incorporated

Early in 1963, The Chad Mitchell Trio was hired to perform on a long-playing comedy album recorded at RCA Victor studios in New York City. Comedian Wally Cox wrote a script poking fun at the controversy raging at that time over what could be legitimately called a folk song and who could be considered pure and unsullied folk singers. Along with the Belafonte Singers, the trio recorded several songs used on the album. Only one of those songs was performed solely by The Trio.

At one point, Cox suggests that folk songs were not solely the province of hillbillies. He suggested people with urban roots—citibillies—could also share in folk music traditions. He offered The Ballad of Murder Incorporated as an example.

The Ballad of Murder Incorporated was written by Ernie Lieberman, who performed under the name Ernie Sheldon. Ernie replaced Lou Gottlieb in The Gateway Singers in 1958. He later joined The Limelites as Glen Yarbrough in the Limelites. He was an accomplished lyricist whose most famous song was Yarbrough's biggest hit, "Baby the Rain Must Fall."

Once Cox's album was recorded, it received a cold reception from RCA. The project never got out of the studio and only three copies of the album were pressed. Mike Kobluk received one of the copies under instructions to show it to Milt Okun and the other members of the trio.

"I didn't think the whole thing worked at all," Mike said. "The album just wasn't funny. So I didn't show it to anyone. I just put it away."

In fact, Mike didn't dust off his copy of the album until fifty-five years later when he played it for author Mike Murphey and Chad Mitchell during one of their interview sessions for "We Never Knew Just What It Was ... The Story of the Chad Mitchell Trio." That was the first time Chad ever heard the recording.

The album might not have been funny, but this song is, and it was performed superbly by Mike, Joe and Chad accompanied by Paul Prestopino on guitar.

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