

To err is profitable: eBay mistake nets seller \$10,000 for rare Bay Area single

While many teen-age girls in 1960 were dreaming of becoming wives and mothers, Denise Kaufman was absorbing the nightclub scene in San Francisco. "I started writing songs when I was about 6, and I never stopped," she said. "At age 15 I started hanging out at the Shiloh in San Francisco, a small coffeehouse and folk club, listening to all the great players who passed through there like Barbara Dane, Terry Wadsworth, and Skip James."

In 1965, playing harmonica while skateboarding through the University Of California at Berkeley campus, she had a chance meeting with jazz drummer Lonnie Hewitt, who had just started his own label, Wee Records. Hewitt was looking for artists to record and wanted to hear what the teenager had written. The two honed in on a piece she had composed a year earlier, about her ex-boyfriend, "Boy, What'll You Do Then." Remembering a group of Berkeley High School students who had their own band, The Answer, she enlisted the teens to play backup on the record. "Chip Wright, who was 16 at the time, played lead guitar, Mike Friedman played bass, I played harmonica, and Lonnie himself played drums," she said (the A-side is credited to Denise only).

An estimated 100 copies of the disc (including the B-side, "Chaos" credited to Denise And Co.) were pressed (Wee BMI 107). "After we recorded it, Lonnie took it to Bill Gavin [publisher of the *Gavin Report*, a national compilation of radio record playlists], for his reaction and to see if we could get some airplay. Gavin thought it was too raw, didn't have a pop sound. He didn't like it at all," Kaufman said. But the bad luck didn't end there. Shortly thereafter Hewitt's car was broken into, and most of the band's singles were stolen. The song never saw airplay, and the single was never repressed. "It wasn't ever available anywhere — not in stores, no distribution, nowhere," said Kaufman, who went on to the very successful local all-female group, Ace Of Cups. The song was never heard from again, and Denise herself didn't even own a copy. "I had two or three and lost my last one about 20 years ago," she admitted.

Oakland, Calif.-based garage band collector Kevin Army was making his normal rounds at various flea markets, looking for local, Bay Area independent label recordings, when he spotted the Denise And Co. record. He paid \$2 for it. "I pick up anything on the Wee label and know that some of it can be rare," he admitted. But Army was completely unaware of the rarity of his latest find. He posted it for auction on eBay Aug. 24,



with a minimum bid of \$4.99. Within a few days bidding escalated to \$5,100. As word quickly spread about the rare find, Kaufman was also contacted. "I heard about this auction because Alec Palao sent me an e-mail that said, 'Guess what's on eBay?'" It was Palao who produced the 2003 Ace Of Cups archive CD *It's Bad For You But Buy It* (Ace/Big Beat 236), the only other place to hear the Denise recording. But with a day to go, eBay abruptly pulled the auction. The reason? The seller noted in his auction description that he would accept cash by mail (an eBay no-no). "I had not known of the change in policy," Army admitted. "I called to ask them to restore the auction, and they wouldn't."

Fellow Bay Area record collector and dealer Barry Wickham was one of many monitoring the auction. When it was pulled from active bidding, he contacted Army. He offered to almost double the previous high bid of \$5,100 and give him \$10,000 for the single. Army accepted. "This is easily twice what I have ever paid for a record," said Wickham, who admitted that he will file the disc away with his other (several thousand) garage recordings. "It is the most important Bay Area garage record ever, as far as I am concerned." The better-late-than-never validation is especially sweet for Kaufman. "When someone tells you your work is meaningless, don't let it stop you," said Kaufman. "Maybe no one gets what you are doing — try not to get discouraged. Whatever your medium of expression is, keep the faith and keep going. Maybe you are just way ahead of the curve."

Kaufman has channeled that positive energy into a successful career as a yoga instructor, teaching privately in Los Angeles and at her studio on her organic farm in Hawaii.

Have you discovered a long sought-after recording on an online auction site? Drop me a line via my Web site, www.isleofwrite.com and tell me more.

— Lisa Wheeler