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Michael Connor, 'Amie' pianist

Pure Prairie League member was 54

LATONIA - Michael Edward Connor, pianist for the country-rock band Pure Prairie League, died Sept. 2 of cancer at his home on Siesta Key near Sarasota, Fla. The Latonia native was 54.

Quiet and modest, Mr. Connor was an exceptional piano player, according to Cliff Radel, former pop music critic for the *Enquirer*. "Connor was all over the piano, playing in a two-fisted Delta blues style popularized by Leon Russell," Radel wrote in a review from the 1970s.

To unwind, Mr. Connor also played classical music at his home in Park Hills, according to his friend Paul Carl of Edgewood. "We'd be talking in the kitchen and he'd go into the dining room and say, 'Come in and sit down. Listen to me play.' He would start playing the piano. It was an outlet at times for him."

Mr. Connor, whose parents, **Selma and Frank Connor**, are both deceased, grew up in Latonia. He took piano lessons as a boy but, as his mother confided to Carl, didn't like to practice.

Mr. Connor graduated from Newport Catholic High School and attended Eastern Kentucky University.

He joined Pure Prairie League in 1972. The group was founded in 1969 in Columbus by Portsmouth native Craig Fuller. He joined in time to be included in the group's second album - *Bustin' Out* - which sold more than 500,000 copies. It debuted "Amie," one of the band's best-known songs, which was a Top 40 hit in 1975.

Mr. Connor appeared on nine of the group's 10 albums. He played when lead singer Vince Gill performed its biggest hit, "Let Me Love You Tonight," in 1979.

Philip Tapia of Mobile, Ala., Pure Prairie League's stage manager from 1978 to 1980, said that Mr. Connor was like a brother to him.

"The road crew were known affectionately as the 'Prairie Dogs.' So Michael named me 'Philly Dog,' " Tapia said.

"The pressures of traveling together ... drew us all closer together. It created a lifetime bond that was unique. We cherished each town, performance and memory made along the way."

Connor, Michael Edward 1949 - 2004

Sometime around 1980, Mr. Connor and the band's bass player, Mike Reilly, bought a house in Park Hills. They lived there until the band was dissolved in 1988. During those years Mr. Connor befriended Carl. A teenager at the time, Carl cared for his aunt's yard, which was next to Mr. Connor's property.

"I happened to be in high school and cutting grass for her and they (Mr. Connor and Reilly) said, 'Do you mind taking care of our yard, too?' Those were my jobs in high school," Carl said. He found Mr. Connor to be a "very nice, down-to-earth man," who was a good listener and gave sound advice.

"Mike was a pretty straightforward guy. (He) really sort of reiterated what my parents would say. (But) when you hear it from somebody who's famous, it really hits home. He more than gave me the time of day."

Pure Prairie League disbanded in 1988. Several members - including Mr. Connor - reunited in 1998 and played during the summers.

Mr. Connor had a passion for horse racing and owned several thoroughbreds. He lived on Siesta Key for the past five years and enjoyed sailing.

"Michael brought joy and laughter to the hearts of many and will be sorely missed forever," said his wife, Heidi Anderson Connor.

In addition to his wife, survivors include two children, Corina and Chris Duffy, both of Sarasota.

Visitation is 9 a.m. Saturday followed by prayers at 10:15 a.m. at Connley Brothers Funeral Home, 11 E. Southern Ave. in Latonia.

Mass of Christian burial is 10:30 a.m. at Holy Cross Church, 3612 Church St. in Covington. Burial will follow at Mother of God Cemetery in Fort Wright.

Memorials: Back Stretch Works of Mercy, c/o Father Niehaus, P.O. Box 727, Florence, Ky. 41022.

