

Mellowing Rod Stewart looks back on bad times ... and laughs

By CLIFF RADEL

Gannett News Service

Without even trying, Rod Stewart has become rock's answer to Rodney Dangerfield.

He had a disco hit, "Do Ya Think I'm Sexy," and the critics ground him up for dog food.

His gold records let him live the life of Rockefeller and the punk rockers called him Public Sellout No. 1.

Music profile

He made a live album and not only did his record company, Warner Bros., reject it, they stuck him with the tab just because he was such a good sport.

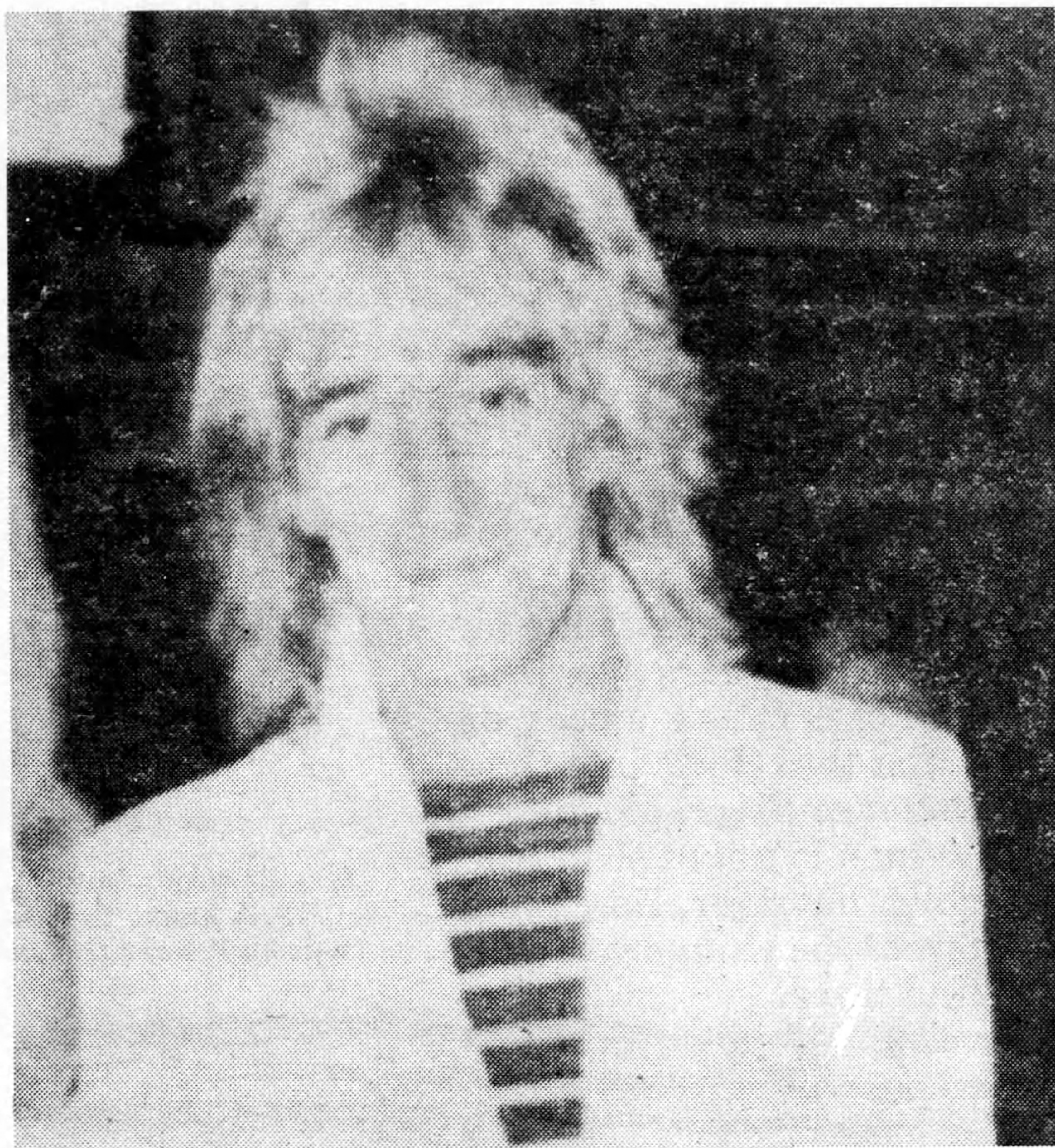
The Rod Stewart of old would have exploded at being reminded of those bad times.

This time, he laughed.

Stewart admitted that going disco, although profitable, was an artistic error. As for the punk rockers' charges of forsaking rock 'n' roll for the good life, he downplayed the issue by insisting, "It was all blown out of proportion by two journalists in England. Since then, I've run into a lot of punk individuals — already that term 'punk' sounds rather dated doesn't it — and I haven't gotten any stink from them."

Stewart harbors no hard feelings against his detractors. He even likes some of the new acts such as the Police — "Although they're hardly new; two members are over 30" — and the Clash. "I just wish they'd stop moaning about everything. They've got it in them to make a good, commercial album. Perhaps they don't want to. But then I thought that was the idea of this business, to make music for yourself and sell it to the public."

Mentioning the Clash brought a chuckle from Stewart. "I know some very interesting facts about them," he noted. "We share the same accountant. They're just as worried about their mortgages as



Rod Stewart

everybody else." That must mean the Clash fibbed when they took their vows of eternal poverty.

The live album is another story.

"We made it two years ago. We gave it to Warner Bros. and they turned it down. Their excuse was it was too close to 'Foolish Behaviour' and too close to the album we have out now ('Tonight I'm Yours')."

Stewart did not sound convinced.

"Now, I've got the tape," he grumbled, "and there's nothing I can do with it. It cost me \$80,000 and now it's worthless. That tape has my old band on it."

But as every mother tells her disappointed child, this rejection just might be all for the best.

"My new band is 1,000 times better than the old one," Stewart admitted. "In my last band I had a Jamaican bass player and a drummer from the Bronx. They just didn't agree on rock and roll. They were always pulling each other in the wrong way."

As a result, the band and its singer went nowhere,

for years. Why didn't the singer, a notorious smart mouth, say those two simple words, "You're fired," sooner?

"Because I'm a very loyal guy," he answered.

Along with the drummer and bass player Stewart also got rid of "the gloss that was surrounding me. I got back to rock and roll. Oh, we're still playing some of the same numbers we played on our last tour (i.e. some disco ditties), but our approach is a lot different. I'm more committed than I was in 1977. I've fallen in love all over again with rock 'n' roll."

And it couldn't have happened at a better time. Stewart's rock renaissance has attracted a new, younger audience.

"That's very healthy," he observed. "I'd hate to end up like the Beach Boys playing to a room full of bloody 35- and 40-year-olds, even though I'm in that age group myself."

Stewart let go with an audible moan. Was he suddenly feeling ancient?

"No," he replied, "I just looked out my window and I

can't see a thing. There's a blizzard out there. It's terrible. 'Tour in January,' they said. 'You'll enjoy yourself,' they said. Like (bleep) I will. Do you know it's 82 degrees in L.A. today? What am I doing in bloody Pittsburgh in a bloody blizzard?"

The answer to that is: Enjoying himself.

"I am," he agreed. "I'm in amazing shape. I have to be. I'm on stage 2½ hours every night. I ran a mile the other day. Would you believe it was under six minutes? I do that to increase my lung power. I don't smoke and I hardly drink anymore."

Stop the presses. Rod Stewart, "Dr. Party," is not touching alcohol.

"I only have two glasses of white wine before I go on stage," he said. "That's it."

This is unbelievable.

"That's what my wife thinks, too. I told her about my not drinking and she wondered what happened to the man she married. He used to be so exciting. Now, he sounds like a such a bore."