

Excerpted from *On a Cold Road*, unedited.



TORONTO, PT. 1

“Above the din, we listen for other music.”
– B.W. Powe, “A Canada of Light”

When we first started playing around Toronto, Canadian bands were never our heroes. We were more taken with New Wave groups from the United States or England. The few Canadian bands whom we admired -- the Rent Boys, Inc. and Dave Howard Singers -- had fled to England to further their careers, and the lesson seemed to be that if you were a cool and progressive-minded group, you had to leave town in order to achieve real success. Since we had little chance of maintaining a career playing interesting, original music in Canada, I was certain that I would leave, it was only a question of when and where I'd go.

At the time, the record business did little to promote Canada as a bountiful place to make progressive art. The Canadian Association of Recorded Arts and Sciences (CARAS) made foreign stars like Aerosmith and Rod Stewart the main attraction at sycophantic JUNO award shows; critics over-stated the contribution of American residents like Joni Mitchell and Neil Young to the national rock scene; and record companies offered artists like Honeymoon Suite as stellar examples of an indigenous pop machine. It was only natural that we turn to the Ramones and other New Wave D.I.Y. bands for guidance. If we'd been aware of the existence of groups like The Nihilist Spasm Band or DOA (who, while unknown to us, were in the process of revolutionizing modern music), we might have thought differently. It didn't help that hundreds of other strange and exciting bands -- Plasterscene Replicas, Woods Are Full of Cuckoos, Vital Sines, The CeeDees, Fifth Column, Jolly Tambourine Man, DV8 -- were neglected by record companies and ignored by college kids, who still thought that alternative rock was fag music. Even though Teenage Head, Goddo, Rough Trade, The Government, L'Etranger, Martha and the Muffins and The Diodes did okay, if making it big in Canada meant that I had to dress and sound like Mike Reno, I would just as soon have moved away.

Then one day, I heard Stompin' Tom.

The first time I held one of his records was at the Vinyl Museum on Lakeshore Road in Toronto, a sooty old record store that sells albums with beers-and-smokes encrusted goop on their covers for 99 cents apiece. Besides having a reputation for being a goldmine of unwanted wax, the Vinyl Museum is managed by a religious neophyte named Peter Dunn, who prints bible quotations on his record sleeves. Those who buy, say, Yanni Live At the Acropolis will find passages proclaiming “The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers!” and while I'm sure that Yanni fans are among the least likely people to freak out and axe murder their parents, how Mr. Dunn ever reconciled selling WASP or Mega Death albums to kids is beyond me. But

whatever his reasoning, his pious record depot did deliver unto me “My Stompin’ Grounds,” and for that I owe him no small debt.

It was chewed at the corners and had the outline of the vinyl worn through in a half-smile at the bottom. At the top was the handwritten signature of its former owner -- Sylvester Lefforts -- a great Canadian name better sounded with a wheatstraw poking between one’s teeth. The record jacket featured postcards of the Calgary Stampede and Niagara Falls floating around Tom’s body as he walked down the railroad tracks holding a smoke. Tom looked visibly concerned -- not just because rodeo horses seemed to be charging towards his goolies -- but because he was staring into Canada’s future and clearly not at ease with what he saw. From his expression, I should have known that there was strong stuff on this record, but at the time, I thought that Canadian music was all Rene Simard and Percy Faith and The Laurie Bower Singers -- pudic, laxative artists who wouldn’t know a fuzzbox if it thunked them in the head.

I gave the record a few spins. Then it laid around for awhile. Every now and then, my friends and I would play the songs about snowmobiles, “Wop” May and the Reversing Falls for their comedic value. While it possessed a novel charm, I must admit that I experienced no sense of cultural enlightenment while listening to it, nor did I feel anything close to the epiphany that would later hit me like a ham shot from a cannon. In fact, the sound of Tom grinding his boot-heel into his wooden plank was sometimes too much to bear, and when I read on the back of the album that the percussion parts were actually credited to “Tom’s foot,” I had to take it off for fear of splitting a gut. We put the record away and moved on to more sophisticated groups, like The Headboys, Fingerprintz and Flock of Seagulls. You know, future music.

But shit sneaks up on you. It’s taken years to absorb records that I now count among my favourites-- “Sailin’ Shoes” by Little Feat; “Doc at Radar Station” by Captain Beefheart and his Magic Band; “Talking Heads ‘77” -- and likewise, I had to get out of Canada before I could enjoy the poignant heaviness of “My Stompin’ Grounds.” I spent the summer of 1985 in Dublin, Ireland, at Trinity College, where I kept a small, sunny room overlooking a croquet pitch first turned by Queen Elizabeth in 1592. That summer, like any young thinking person, I spent countless hours sitting on my window ledge rolling around ideas about my life and where it was headed. At the time, I was caught in a crossfire of muses; I’d been a junior New Wave musician in Toronto, but the Rheostatics’ skinny-tie pop experiment had shown little audience growth and even less promise for a hit-making career. We’d added the Trans Canada Soul Patrol, and our sound had taken on the form of spastic pop tunes impregnated with exhausting saxophone solos. At the same time, I’d also written scads of articles for newspapers and magazines, and was enjoying a double life as a hopeful music journalist. Finally, after a few months wandering around Dublin in the most remarkable Guinness and whiskey fog, I saw my life’s trajectory change. I decided to cast off my aspirations as a fourth generation CanRocker. I pitched away the glitter. I would become a writer.

But in the end, Stompin’ Tom had something to say about that. He’d found his way across the ocean too, on a C90 tape with selections from Dylan and The Band’s “Basement Tapes” on the other side. I played Tom’s music for my Irish friends and, to my surprise, they liked it. “My Stompin’ Grounds” became a way of communicating what Canada was like without having to stumble through my own unrealized ideas about home (Tom, after all, had a song naming the provinces and their capitals, a handy geography lesson in under three minutes). Pretty soon I found myself listening to it in private as I sat at my desk writing the first fifty pages of a long dead novel. As time wore on, Tom’s voice drew me back across the ocean, and those songs about bobcats and Wilf Carter that I’d once been embarrassed to listen to had anchored my identity in a culture where nationhood was everything, teaching me who I was and where I came from in the same way that it had informed the Irish. To a twenty-two year old kid unsure of his character, Tom’s voice -- a hoser’s cocktail of Hank Williams mixed with Popeye -- reminded me that I wasn’t born yesterday, and that I lived somewhere, too.

Upon returning home later that fall, I decided to find Tom and tell him all about it. Part of this quest was brought about by the cultural free fall one often experiences after arriving home from a strange land. But while Toronto seemed drab and uptight compared to Dublin, I was excited that there was a new Canada waiting to be explored, one that I hadn't known before going abroad. "My Stompin' Grounds" had conjured up a panoramic winterland of railroads and folk music and taverns and hockey rinks, which, in its own way, was as unlike suburban Etobicoke as Europe had been. And while I'd had to cross an ocean to find Ireland, Stompin' Tom's Canada was only up the highway.

Of course, I had no idea what I was getting myself into. Tom, I discovered, was missing in action. He'd been in self-imposed exile since 1977, having dropped out of sight after withdrawing from public life in protest of the pro-American habits of the Canadian music industry. In 1977, Stompin' Tom asked to play the Grandstand at the CNE, only to be offered the smaller Bandstand by organizers. When Tom visited the CNE offices to discuss the matter, he was informed that the talent bookers were in Las Vegas scouting American acts. Tom called a press conference, gave back his JUNO awards, and cancelled all public appearances for one year to prove that he'd taken his stand in the interests of Canadian musicians, not, as some had suggested, to attract publicity. Naturally, this endeared him to me further, as did the understanding that no one in Canada -- not even Peter Gzowski, who'd put out a nationwide call -- had seen him for over a decade.

I took up the search. I found the usual footprints: newspaper clippings, concert films, tour programs, magazine stories, song books, and gold records-- the basic kit box of an aging Canadian pop legend. These documents showed that, in the mid-70s, Stompin' Tom was Canada's most famous musician: 28 consecutive sold-out nights at the Horseshoe, an audience with the Queen, his own show on CBC television, and an introduction by mayor Toronto David Crombie before the first of his two sold-out shows at Massey Hall. He'd also moved huge numbers of records nationwide, which explained why he continued to be yield requests for public appearances; it was almost as if his audience had been in denial about their hero's exile. But nine years down the road, it was obvious to many that Tom wasn't coming back. I assumed that his story would end like many other Canadian entertainers-- as an afterthought in the Great Canadian Rock and Roll encyclopedia that would never be written.

But in the winter of 1986, everything changed. I put in a lot of time at Boot Records, Tom's record label in Mississauga, and it was there that stuff started to happen. I got on well with the receptionist, who prepared files for me whenever she saw me pull into the parking lot. Sometimes she'd say, "You know, you just missed Tom. He was here not five minutes ago", but I was never sure if she was being straight with me, or whether she was keeping alive my dream that one day I'd walk in and find him sitting in the lobby waiting to talk.

Then she gave me a gift.

I asked her whether or not the record business slowed down in the winter. She shook her head and said that it was the opposite, that she'd been worn out by all of the work. When I asked her why, she looked over both shoulders to make sure no one was watching, then she held up a letter addressed to New Brunswick premier Richard Hatfield. It was an invitation to Tom's fiftieth birthday party. In the top corner of the page, there was the address, date and time, and the name of the town where Tom lived. I gave her a hug, then ran to my car where I wrote down the information.

February 10th
Community Hall
Balnifad, Ontario
4 o'clock sharp

He'd be there if I wanted him.

That afternoon, snow emptied from the sky. Judy, Tim and I headed northwest from the city towards Halton Hills, and one hour later, we turned off the highway and disappeared into the country, the roads white and empty. I carried a petition in my back pocket with 70 names written on it under the heading TOM, WE WANT YOU BACK. I'd passed it around a few weeks before, and people were happy to sign it. I also brought a Rheostatics tape with me. I wanted Tom to know that I was a musician too, not just an interloper, but I later discovered, much to my chagrin, that I'd given him the wrong cassette. It had only one Rheostatics song on it. The others were Patti Smith doing "Hey, Joe" and "Piss Factory."

We arrived at the Balnifad Community Hall, which stood on a hillside overlooking the road. We climbed the wooden steps and heard laughter and fiddle music coming from inside. As we looked in, a young woman came to the door and asked if we knew Tom. We told her that we'd driven there to give him something for his birthday. She told us to wait a minute while she got him. It was the longest minute of my life.

Then he appeared.

Dressed entirely in black, standing about six feet two and wearing a black cowboy hat, he stepped towards us. We recoiled, disbelieving.

"Well, hello there," he said, smoking a smoke.

"Happy birthday," we said.

"Thanks. What's this?" he asked, pointing to my petition.

I handed him the petition and the tape. My memory flutters at this point. I believe, however, that I quoted from a self-penned manifesto I'd memorized the night before, which included stuff like "*the youth of Canada need you to come back, our country's in trouble, save it, the Tory scourge, my band loves Canada, hockey, the National Dream, besides, we think you're really, really great...*"

He laughed.

He looked us over.

"Where're you from, then?" he asked.

"We're from Toronto," we replied.

"You came all the way from Toronto?"

He sounded pleased.

"Geez, you come all the way from Toronto, you might as well come in and have a few drinks!"

We were in.

It was like a dream. The hall was dark and smoky, wooden, filled with revelers. Tom's daughter rolled out a huge cake in the shape of Canada, and people cheered. His wife and kids were there. So was Bud Roberts and Stevedore Steve. I saved a corner of Nova Scotia from the cake. Tom played four songs with his old band -- "Green, Green Grass of Home", "Sudbury Saturday Night", "Gumboot Clogeroo" and "Bud the Spud" -- and he gave a speech. Telegrams were read from people all across Canada. We sat at a long table next to the local OPP officer and his wife. We ran out of smokes, but Tom gave us his deck. Al Cherny played fiddle with the band on "Orange Blossom Special" and we danced with the old ladies. The floor shook as they twirled us around. People clapped. My dream had played itself out.

We drove home thrilled, exuberant.

Tim and I told the fellows in the band about it.

The next year, we toured Canada for the first time.

Suddenly, there we were, on the road...

RANDY BACHMAN: After the song "Hey Girl" became a hit in the UK, The Guess Who flew to London with all our equipment to record an album for King Records. I remember being so excited at the possibility of buying rare Cliff Richards and Beatles singles; I was just as much a fan as I was a musician in those days. So we showed up at the record company's office, where

they laid out a contract on the table, one that would promise us 160\$ per week for the next five years. We asked them about royalties and they said, "Right. Well, you'll get 160\$ per week for the next five years. We said, "Yah. But what about the percentages?" and they just kept repeating themselves. They didn't realize that we were making that kind of money playing highschool dances in Winnipeg. They figured that they could trick us into letting them own The Guess Who, but at that point, we didn't want to be owned by anybody. So we told them, "No thanks," and walked away. We were 20,000\$ in debt to Air Canada and had only 420\$ to spend between seven guys. But that's when we really became a band."

TERRY DAVID MULLIGAN: I remember that when the Guess Who first went to England, none of the homework had been done. I really think the management let them down. They were supposed to be there to record and tour and generally work the area, but they got none of that support when they arrived. The ball had been dropped big-time. I remember being with them in the Marquee Club on the day that the Who released "Happy Jack." The Who did a set and it was just wild. They destroyed everything; Pete Townshend left his guitar sticking through the acoustic tile in the ceiling. The next day, I went to see Pete and he was lovingly restoring the guitar that he'd smashed up. He was sanding it down and putting the neck back on. The song that was on his music stand at the time was called "Song For Bonnie and Clyde," but I don't believe that it was ever finished. The same day, there was a meeting between the two bands; I'm not sure that it was about the name, but it concerned some kind of business.

RANDY BACHMAN: We went and talked to The Who. There wasn't a lot that was said, really. We asked them to change their name because we were getting requests for "My Generation" and they asked us to change ours because they were being confused with the band that did "Shakin' All Over." Neither of us budged, of course. But I remember seeing them perform at a club later that night. They were so loud that the film crew who were shooting them were upset because the volume of John Entwistle's bass was vibrating the film inside their cameras.

JIM MILLICAN: KY58 was a huge Top Forty station on the prairies in Manitoba for years. My favourite deejay was this fellow named Darryl Berlingham. Darryl was the guy who recorded Burton Cummings for the first time in the KY58 studios when he was in The Devrons. I sort of followed in his footsteps. I was a fan and then I became a deejay, and it was a natural move to become part of the Winnipeg scene as a Top Forty deejay. When The Guess Who had that run of singles from "These Eyes" on, there was a lot of pride among the fans, the clubs, the deejays, everyone, about what they'd accomplished. I remember being on the air and taking calls from Jim Kale or Burton Cummings from Birmingham, Alabama or San Francisco, California, and you'd throw them on the air and talk a little about what they were up to and what was going on. You felt connected to them and you were able to feed off their reputation.

TERRY DAVID MULLIGAN: I was walking down the street with Burton in Picadilly Square. Burton did a killer German accent and he'd be saying things like, "Yes, Herr Mulligan. We bombed this street, you know!" I was thinking, "We're gonna die, right here in the street!" We had a good time. I remember the first time the Guess Who were ever interviewed on a television show in England. They asked everybody's name, and when Randy said his, they laughed like crazy, because in England, "randy" meant "horny."

JIM KALE: I was in awe of England. We were just shitfaced little kids. Mini-skirts. You'd get up in the morning just to watch women go to work. One night we went to The Who concert at the Marquee and they blew up the p.a. The BBC were there filming and they weren't too happy about it, because it was their sound system that they'd ruined.

JIM MILLICAN: Randy Bachman had a stretch where he was off the road for a long time. He had gall stones and was laid up. So they went out and got another guitarist to fill in for him and without Randy around, the other guys got an idea of what it was like to conduct business without him. It gave them the confidence to think that they might be able to go on without him. So they split with him, but because he had controlled the business and had been sort of the senior statesman in the band, they needed someone to fill in. Randy was tight with the purse strings and he believed that they could get on with a very small road crew. In those days, their manager did their road managing and they only had one full-time roadie. Sometimes they picked a guy up on the road to do some work for free. This was right up until the time when "American Woman" was the number one record on the planet. They were playing huge places, so I think having toured with other acts and seeing the kinds of organizations around them, they decided to expand. So they hired me as tour manager.

RANDY BACHMAN: One night The Guess Who were playing in Kitchener with Junior Walker and His All-Stars. We were doing our last song of the night when I broke a guitar string, so after the set, I restrung it and went out started jamming on this riff, you know, nothing special. The band joined in and we had something going, so I looked around for Burton and saw him outside the back door of the club, talking to friends. I guess he thought the music he was hearing was some tape over the p.a. system, 'cause when I yelled, "We're jamming!! We're jamming!!" he didn't even move. Finally he realized what was going on, so he hopped up on stage and sat down at the piano. I started to yell, "SING SOMETHING!" and so he started screaming: "AMERICAN WOMAN! STAY AWAY FROM MEEHEEE!"

JIM MILLICAN: It was an unusual back then to be a Canadian act on the road in the United States. There just weren't a lot of them. We developed a shtick with a beaver logo that was super-imposed on the Canadian flag. We made stickers and t-shirts and people loved them. We also had a Canadian flag back-drop that we'd raise from the floor during the long solo in "American Woman" that used to get an unbelievable response from American audiences. Canadian ones loved it too, of course, but the Americans just were crazy about that part of the show; they really ate it up.

RANDY BACHMAN: Times have changed. I remember going to Kresge's in Winnipeg and picking up Billboard and reading that "Shakin' All Over" was number 22 on the charts. The lady behind the desk didn't believe me when I told her that this was our group, The Guess Who. She didn't believe that a band that was on the charts could be from Winnipeg. A few days later, we got a call from some guy in New York inviting us on the Ed Sullivan show. We cut school and arrived in New York expecting all these people to be waiting for us at the studio. Instead, we spent most of the day knocking on the door of the tv station, trying to convince an elderly security guard that we were booked for the big show. As it turned out, we had no such arrangement with Ed, so we ended up at our record company's office, where they introduced us to Burt Bacharach and Hal David, Ashford and Simpson. The rest of the time I spent sitting quietly in the corner of the recording studio, watching Dionne Warwick make her new album.

JEANINE HOLLINGSHEAD: There was a lot of talk back then about musicians seeking opportunity in America. A lot of people had it on their minds; it was just the way it was. In 1966, I was with Neil Young and Bruce Palmer when they left for Los Angeles in the hearse. I'm the only other person who got to drive that hearse. Neil was very picky about it because he'd already burned one up with The Squires. It was a standard; an old three-speed, a monster. We were six young, Beatle-haired, guitar-totin', shirt-flappin' hippies. We were Neil and Bruce, Mike Gallagher (who was invited because he had gas money), Tannis Neiman (because she was doing the same thing Neil was doing, which was going to California with the idea of getting into the

music scene), Judy Mack (who was in love with Neil and just along for the ride), and me, who was the only other one who could drive standard. Besides, I had relatives in Los Angeles, too. Me, Tannis and Mikey got out in Albuquerque. The hearse broke down and had to be fixed. The fellow who ran the garage thought that Neil and Tannis were Sonny and Cher because they were two young, dark-haired singers. Neil went a little bananas. It was the beginning of his awareness of his epilepsy. We had to hospitalize him. He was suffering from exhaustion, basically. While he was in the hospital, I wound up in the hospital, too. When he was ready to move on, I wasn't ready yet. I had suffered two serious injuries while I was in Albuquerque. One was blowing up my face in a gas oven in a motel room. I went to light the oven and it took my eyebrows and hair and skin off. Then about a week into that, while walking around with this bandaged, mummy face, I developed kidney stones. Neil was burning to get going, but I was not. My friend Tannis wasn't about to leave me there alone in that condition, either. Mikey wasn't any more interested in going to LA than anywhere else, so he stayed with us. After I got better, we hitched all the way into LA together. The first person we ran into was Neil. We went over to Ben Frank's Drive-In and the first thing we saw was the Pontiac hearse with Canadian plates. But Tannis had managed to get herself pregnant in Albuquerque, so she wasn't in a great mood and really wanted to go back to Canada. The only thing I'd ever really wanted to do was go to Vancouver, so she and I hitch-hiked and bussed up the coast and we finally got to Vancouver. She was pretty well pregnant by then; six to eight weeks and you started to notice. She really needed to get back. She didn't leave me in Albuquerque, so I didn't leave her out west. We made it back to Toronto under separate cover. We hiked back with two guys from Vancouver who wanted to see Yorkville. Instead of the four of us traveling together, we split up into pairs because it was easier to get rides that way. It was also safer, for everybody. We'd been away for six months. When we got back to Toronto around July or August, Yorkville was really starting to happen.

FRAZIER MOHAWK: Steven (Stills) had talked about getting Neil in the Springfield, but first we brought down Kenny Koblun, who was a friend of Steven's and he was a great bass player. But he couldn't take it and so he fled. He left a little note on his pillow: "I can't take it." I was in the Bentley with Steven when we met Neil and Bruce. They remember it being a van, but I remember it being the Bentley. I had been a roadie with The Byrds, and so when the Springfield came together, this made it easy to get management help and good bookings. Eventually, Springfield became the opening act for The Byrds. Each guy in the Springfield had his own visual trademark and the criteria for putting the band together was finding single performers who could hold their own, individually, as singer/songwriters and who could compliment each other. The Springfield was also a great little back-up band for the individuals. But it was never destined to last; conceptually, it was put together as a vehicle for the individuals, because it was easier to have one group instead of five and they'd all tried it as singles and it didn't happen. The egos, however, were just too strong. There was a lack of understanding that it was a business entity. There were Greenstone (agency) guys who gave them limos and inflated what they were and made them feel like they were big stars when, in fact, that really hadn't happened. It was a facade, yet they believed it. When you start believing you own press, you know you're in trouble.

RICHARD FLOHIL: Ian and Sylvia were the first Canadian act to play Carnegie Hall and sell it out. They brought Lightfoot down to Albert Grossman, and from '65 through, folk music here was becoming very nationalistic, in part due to Expo '67, which proved for the first time that we could do something bigger and better than the Americans. A decade before, we'd spent all this time just sponging up American music, and now it was time to move on. Before, there had been no record labels, no recording studios, no managers, no industry infrastructure. The idea of the Canadian Content regulations -- which came out of that period of musical growth -- was to build the whole infrastructure. To this day, I think that that simple regulation got radio people to do something instead of slavishly responding to whatever came from America. Of course, it was

awful at first. Everybody formed bands, record companies, built bad studios and went crazy and the quality was very low. But things leveled off, and once over that hump, the greatness emerged.

BARRY ALLEN: Can Con impacted dramatically on us. When we first had records out, there weren't any Can Con laws. You got played because you knew the djs and it spread; when it clicked, it was because it was a good tune. At first we were lucky because our single, "Love Drops," was on Capitol (we were signed by Paul White), so we had promo men in there saying, "Hey, this record is getting good reaction across the country, get on it." But Can Con made the regional acts happen; it was critical that it came in and that radio stations had to expand their base. Otherwise, it would just be worse than it is now in terms of playing the American stuff. When you think of all the incredible bands and music being made by Canadian artists, that the infrastructure here doesn't support it in a big way is disgusting.

TERRY DAVID MULLIGAN: Anne Murray, The Guess Who and Gordon Lightfoot held a press conference and said, "Canadian content is killing us." At the time, there was only a handful of acts and since everybody had to fulfill thirty-three percent Canadian content, they'd played the shit out of those bands and there was a backlash. These artists wanted them to knock it off, to play other bands. That's when they started to loosen it up and we found out that people like Gene Cornish from the Young Rascals had been born in Hamilton and Zal Yanofsky was from Kingston and their Canadian connection qualified them under the code.

RICHARD FLOHIL: People like Lightfoot and Bryan Adams bitch about the Canadian content rules for three reasons. One, Canadian talent's good enough, it doesn't need it; two, it breeds a huge amount of mediocrity; and three, it hurts those who are successful because Americans think you can't really be good because you're propped up by the system. But these people have all made it, so what're they worried about? You talk to the guys who ran agencies in the late 60's. Back then, Canadian bands could not tour outside their own geographical area because, in the case of Toronto bands, no one the other side of Thunder Bay knew who they were, not until a system was in place where radio stations would play their records. I was managing Downchild in the late-60's and home recorded our first album in the basement of Rochdale for 500 dollars. RCA picked it up and paid 2000 dollars for it, and we couldn't believe the money. The first gig we played in Winnipeg, it was triumphant; four guys in one hotel room, six in the other. These days bands tour all around and get hotel rooms all the time, but in those, it was unheard of. The agents would be lucky if there were four or five bands on their roster who could tour across the country.

SKINNY TENN: Why do we even need regulations? Aren't you supposed to go the extra mile for your neighbour? When some song about living in the ghetto is getting airplay over a great Canadian song, what does that say about our industry? That's why I've always thought that the Can Con rules were totally necessary. Always. Anybody who's ever suggested that they're not is so fuckin' wrong. It's bullshit, man. The sad thing is that radio could support Canadian acts and, in fact, have bigger ratings than they already do.

SHARI ULRICH: If we didn't have Can Con, Canadian music just wouldn't get the support that it gets. For the longest time, the unfortunate reality was that Canadians didn't like to support their own until they had that official sanction of being successful in the U.S. I think it's less so now, but I think that's because Canadian music got its shot on the airwaves. It got a chance to grow to the point where success in Canadian could actually be considered success.

PETER GODDARD: I thought that the whole nationalism in music movement that came out of Can Con was very false, very forced. It was all promotion and I saw it as being very

opportunistic. Canadian music was developing naturally all around North America and the push that this movement gave it tended to capitalize on what was already happening. For instance, I went down on the occasion of Gordon Lightfoot opening in Las Vegas. I was put at a table near the front next to this woman from Sacramento who was Lightfoot's biggest fan. She just loved him, this American woman. I told her that I was from Toronto and we talked a little about the city. But when I told her that I occasionally went to Georgian Bay, her eyes lit up. It was like the magic kingdom to her. So the music was already resonant. An identity was being established and I didn't think we needed the government to define what it was for those who already supported Canadian bands.

RA MCGWIRE: I think the whole issue of Can Con is bullshit. You're a good band or you're not a good band. If you're marginal, it helps and I think that's really cool. I think that those who created it had their hearts in the right place and, personally, I think it's important that somebody's watching out for Canadian artists in that way. But, as far as the whines that I hear about it affecting people's careers or not, they're two separate issues.

DENTON YOUNG: Back in those days, record companies came to see you in bars, but not until the mid-70's were they even looking at Canadian bands. There was only The Guess Who, Gordon Lightfoot and Anne Murray. Canadians didn't look at Canadian music unless it got noticed in the States first. Which is not uncommon now even, although we have a lot more respect for our abilities. Bands were not supported the way they are now. Now, you can get a group of guys together with some good recording equipment and put together a decent enough product and take it to a record company and sign a deal without having toured anywhere. But bands back then didn't create albums. We didn't imagine in a million years that we'd really do an album.

GREG GODOVITZ: We played a simulcast gig at the Bathurst Street Theatre which was a triumph. I played piano for the first time live; that was terrifying because I'd never played piano on stage, with horns behind me, lit beautifully. It was a big-time tv production. The next morning, I went from Spadina and Bloor where I was living to my mom's place at the end of the subway line, and there was a little old lady sitting across from me. She looked at me and she goes, "I liked your TV show last night." I thought it was funny. Last night, I was the guy that ruled the roost, today I'm the guy who's picking up the droppings. You always equate fame with the amount of money you have in the bank, but you really can't in Canada. Being famous in Canada means you can have a fantastic gig at the Gardens, but you go home on the subway.

RICHARD FLOHIL: We will never possess enough confidence in our abilities to stop asking famous Canadian bands why they haven't made it in the States. Why? Because we're ten percent of this continent, we're stretched out to our capacity, eighty percent of us live within one hundred miles of the US border, we listen to American radio, we watch American television, we see American films, listen to American music, we read American magazines and books, but somehow, that stuff washes over us and we resist it by occasionally acknowledging that we have people who represent us.

JIM KALE: Everybody's looking to blow the bloody Canadian horn, and they always seem to end up looking at us, The Guess Who. Why are we doing this for the 74th time? Most of it's completely full of shit anyway. I can't take it seriously. I'm just one of the guys from southeast Winnipeg.