



Indian Rock

This piece was written for the program to "Drive By: A Road Trip with Jeff Thomas," an exhibition of photographs at the University of Toronto Art Centre that explored "the symbolic juxtapositions of past and present, historical imagery and contemporary reality, in the relationship of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in North America." The exhibit ran 1 May to 29 June 2008.

- » Why doesn't the radio play any Indian classic rock bands, Fred?
- » Careful what you wish for, Earl.
- » Like Blackfoot or Crowchild. They rocked pretty good.
- » Is this what driving through the glorious vastness and beauty of the country on your way to Toronto to see your friend's art exhibit evokes in you, Earl? The sound of twin Les Pauls screeching over the painful howling of a greasy-looking singer blotto'ed on rum and cokes?
- » Blackfoot were good, Fred. They opened for The Who.
- » That was back in 1983. Not even The Who were good in 1983.
- » Wasn't Neil Young part-Indian? They play him on the radio all the time.
- » Neil Young wanted to be an Indian, like every other 60s pop star. Ok, maybe not that guy from Herman's Hermits. But pretty much everyone else.
- » What about Buffy? You don't like Buffy?
- » She's ok if you like the sound of goats mewling in a barn.
- » But she was hardcore, Fred. Someone told me that "Gypsies, Tramps and Thieves" never would have happened without her.
- » Precisely, Earl.
- » What about Marlon Brando and the Academy Awards?
- » It was because of the weeping Indian, Earl. The single most popular native image in American culture, and he wasn't even an Indian.
- » C'mon!
- » Iron Eyes Cody was Italian. Get used to it.
- » But he recorded with Joni Mitchell. He sang on "Lakota."
- » Joni might have a good way with a lyric, but as far as telling who's an Indian and who isn't, she's fairly lost.
- » The next thing you're going to tell me is that Chief Dan was Belgian.
- » You mean Geswanouth Slahoot? He came from North Van. Was probably the third most famous Indian of his time. Behind Cher, no thanks to you.
- » True, there are gaps in my knowledge. But I didn't have to live through the '70s, and for that I'm grateful. It's a lot easier being a kickass dude kicking ass in the 21st century.
- » Is that what you consider yourself? A kick-ass dude?
- » I might be a legend in my own mind, Fred. But I'm a legend nonetheless.
- » In my day, legends didn't read Swedish porno mags and smoke blunts.



- » These periodicals help sustain my interest in the lively arts. And these aren't blunts, Fred. They're American Spirit. All natural. All native.
- » You could market encephalitis so long as you put an eagle or a crow or a head-dress on the front of the package. People would flock to it. People would eat it up.
- » People want a piece of what we have, Fred.
- » An old Buick and a wrinkled copy of *Asses and Lasses*?
- » I mean our spirituality, our culture.
- » Spirituality they get in their ginger root and ginseng, Earl. They get their fix through the Chinese. With us, they get to feel less guilty. Don't think that didn't factor into the success of "Gypsies, Tramps and Thieves."
- » Still, it had a driving beat, don't you think? I can hear it right now, in my head.
- » That all you hear, Earl?
- » That and a voice telling me to attack you with this Zippo. Hey, someone said that Derek Miller does pretty good at the folk festivals. Shingoose, Kashtin, too.
- » The Universal Light were a fine band. Were. Are. Were. You see them lately, Earl?
- » I saw them on APTN.
- » They made it on to APTN?
- » Right between *Dances with Wolves* and an old *Red Green* rerun.
- » I might not know everything, Earl, but I know that Red Green wasn't Indian.
- » No, but his coat was.
- » Does that qualify?
- » For what, Fred?
- » For Standards and Practices, Earl. The CRTC, all that.
- » All what?
- » Can Con, Earl. APTN has to play programs that have a certain amount of Indian content. It's like the old Maple Law.
- » What's the old Maple Law, Fred?
- » In 1967, radio stations in Canada were required to play Canadian artists to stay in business.
- » Then why can't we hear Blackfoot!
- » Because they play Allannah Myles instead. She in that magazine of yours?
- » Is she Swedish?
- » I dunno. Maybe. She's sexy though.
- » Isn't she, like, 700 years old?
- » Yes. But, in 1983...
- » And didn't she have a unibrow?
- » You say that like it's a bad thing.
- » It's not really where you want the hair to be, Fred.
- » I suppose not, Earl.
- » And if she's the reason we can't hear Crowchild or Blackfoot, I want even less to do with her.
- » Fair enough.
- » We need more Crowchild!
- » I hear there's gonna be some music at Jeff's thing.
- » A live band?
- » I don't know. Maybe a drum circle.
- » Oh.
- » What do you mean, "Oh?"
- » It's just that I've heard a lot of drum circles, Fred.
- » Drum circles represent the very heartbeat of our people's culture. But, admittedly, they tend to go on.
- » Maybe Crowchild will reform. Can you imagine that? Crowchild and the side of our old car in the same show?

- » You really think he'll use the car? I should have given him some of my old piping. I've got lots in the yard. We redid the kitchen last year.
- » Oh, he'll use it, Fred. Jeff is kinda crazy that way.
- » Good crazy, though.
- » Ya, that's what I meant.
- » He's gone pretty much everywhere, taking pictures of Indians, and how they're shown on, you know, apple crates, trailer parks, bus lines, all that. He's done miles of driving, months of travel.
- » That's a lot of smokes and porno mags, Fred.
- » Some people get by using other means, Earl.
- » It must get lonely out there. Just a dude and his camera. At least we have each other, Fred.
- » You know how to make a guy feel special, Earl.
- » Still, I think that part of Jeff's travel is about that loneliness. Well, maybe not loneliness. Maybe solitude, isolation. Like, you know how you feel when you're at the supermarket and you come across a tin of Apache shoe polish, or Warrior-brand scrub pads or an Atlanta Braves pennant sticking out of a box at the back of the store? I think that's kind of what Jeff's saying, Earl. Our culture has not only been misrepresented and distorted by so many balding manufacturing executives in tie-pins and cufflinks, in the process it's been neglected and abandoned. Instead of native culture being misrepresented, it's hardly represented at all.
- » But weren't you the one who said that "Gypsies, Tramps, and Thieves" wasn't any good?
- » It isn't, but why does it have to be one or the other, Earl. Why does it have to be either Crowchild or Allanah Myles? Why can't we have Warrior-brand scrub pads and Norval Morrisseau? Tina Keeper and Elijah Harper? Why can't we be all of these things? The Italians have Andrew Dice Clay and Robert DeNiro. The Jews have Richard Lewis and Bob Dylan. The Irish have Riverdance and The Boomtown Rats.
- » Like Crowchild and Jeff's photos.
- » What?
- » Crowchild and Jeff's photos. That pretty much covers the range of good and bad, at least according to you.
- » Meaning what, Earl?
- » Meaning that we can have them both, at least if we want to. "Crowchild and Jeff Thomas: Together At Last." That's what he should call his show. We'll tell him when we get there.
- » Earl, that's the smartest thing you've said all trip.
- » If you hang around me long enough, Fred, it tends to happen.
- » Alright, Earl. Try the radio now. You never know when an Indian might get lucky.