

The Barn Dance Opera Journal

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Spring Edition

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WESTERN SWING ... STILL SWINGIN'

By Grant Heywood

It was the 'big band era' that spawned the hybrid country music we know as western swing. For me, as a musician, it is definitely one of my favourite styles of music to play and it gives most musicians a chance to really showcase their musical expertise.

Spade Cooley coined the term 'Western Swing' in the early '40's. 'Spade' had it all. He owned a 20 acre ranch in Los Angeles, America's largest Swing band, the longest running T.V. show, and likely the most popular entertainer west of the Mississippi. It all ended in 1961 when 'Spade' murdered his 2nd wife, (Ella Mae Evans) because he thought she was having an affair with cowboy star Roy Rogers. Eight years later, in '69, he died of a coronary while still in prison.

'Western Swing' (sometimes called Texas Swing), was predominantly a product of Texas and Oklahoma. The bands who played 'Western Swing' could play the same music that the big bands were playing, but because of the smaller instru-

mentation and 'local style', it wasn't a Big Band sound, it had a different 'feel' with more of an ensemble style of playing. Fiddles, guitar and often steel guitar were predominant when bands played 'Western Swing' at the roadhouses, county fairs and dancehalls.

Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys were likely the most well known group to popularize 'Western Swing' music. Born in 1905, Bob played fiddle at an early age and by 1930 his career started taking off with a radio show, recordings and performing for dances. He worked out of Fort Worth, Texas and had continued success on radio into the 1940's and by 1945 his 23 member band was outdrawing Tommy Dorsey and Benny Goodman. Will's reported making \$340,000 that same year in Time magazine.

Between moving from Texas to California and Oklahoma, there was time served in the army, movies, recording, touring, radio shows. But Bob also faced, marriages, divorces, lawsuits, rip-off's from accountants, band member prob-

lems. Through the '50's Will's played Vegas, had a television show, and a successful recording career, but in '62 he took a heart attack with another to follow in '64. In 1968 he was voted into the Country Music Hall of Fame with a Lifetime Achievement Award. (he was also inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, posthumously) Although Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys continued touring, it was in 1969 that he took a stroke, which slowed him down. But he rallied to complete his last recording with Merle Haggard. Bob Wills died in 1975 after an 18 month coma. Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys will always be remembered for classic songs such as, Rose of San Antone, Faded Love, Take Me Back To Tulsa, Roly Poly, Steel Guitar Rag and many more. Give a listen to Bob Wills music sometime and you'll understand what makes Bob holler so much on those records. Great music!

Not unlike Bob Wills, Hank Thompson hailed from Waco, Texas and carved out his own 'Western Swing' sound from the mid '40's into the millennium, eventually

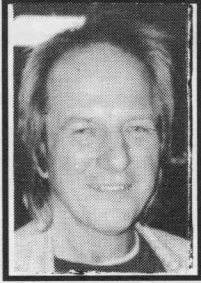
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HANK THOMPSON AND BRAZOS VALLEY BOYS - late 1960's

The Editor Speaks

by Grant Heywood



Hope everyone survived this past winter. It will certainly be one to remember in the record books. But complaining about our Canadian winters is kind of a tradition anyway, unless you were fortunate enough to be somewhere else where it's warmer. Now I know why Warton Willie is white.

When it was cold and blowing outside during the winter, I would try to spend some time listening to new music and often times old music on my vinyl records. You remember vinyl records don't you? They were black discs with a label and hole in the middle and came in a nice colourful cardboard jacket, usually with pictures and information about the artists, musicians, production, history, and sometimes even the lyrics. Wow! What a concept! I don't even mind the crackling or popping once in a while from the scratches (usually from being played over and over again ... or some other form of abuse).

I even have a lot of cassette tapes that I play now and then. Thank goodness I didn't sell my cassette player at our last garage sale. It should be an antique in a few years anyway. I only get to play CDs in my vehicle since it is only equipped with a CD player and a provision for an mp3 player. My CD collection will soon rival my vinyl L.P. collection of over 600 records. It took me a while to warm up to CDs, but I can still hold them in my hand and look at the front cover and read the info. on the inside ... as long as I have a pair of specs handy, or even a big magnifying glass.

I haven't really purchased any songs to

download from websites on the internet as of yet and I don't own an ipod or an mp3 player. My daughter's have told me that I can borrow their mp3 player anytime I wish, but I just haven't had time to use it. I'm still enjoying a lot of my music via old technology, ... records, cassettes ... and now CDs. I don't mind the new way music is being provided to the public via all the different mediums, but I find it kind of sterile and it really bothers me when people download music for free. The music is produced so pristinely, but the graphics and information that you used to get on an album jacket are gone. Unless you own video ipod or iphone where you can scroll through and view it on a screen (about the size of a 2 inch piece of duct tape. Now I'm really squinting, even with the specs on.

I recently heard that vinyl records have been making a bit of a comeback. I doubt if that will have much impact though. They said that traditional country music was coming back too, but I guess that radio didn't get the message. About the only thing you can count on coming back is a George Jones Farewell Tour, Tommy Hunter in January and February, and the people who provide traditional country music festivals and jams during the warmer months of the year, including the Barn Dance.

Something else that I enjoyed over the blustery winter months, was watching live performances from some of my favourite musical artists on DVD, and usually on my friend's big screen television. It's a great experience, almost like having a front row seat and the 5.1 dolby stereo sound is amazing. Usually, the disc includes bonus footage and sometimes interviews with the stars etc. It's cheaper than paying the huge price tag for a decent concert seat, and you don't have to pay for gas or parking. Plus, you get to see the concert as many times as you want and whenever you want. Only problem now is that they are changing the format from regular DVD's to the new blue-ray DVDs. New technology just never

The Barn Dance Historical Society and Entertainment Museum

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(or leave a message)

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www.thebardance.ca

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Simmemaker and Murray Armstrong.

seems to slow down, and sometimes I feel that my pockets just aren't deep enough to keep up at such a frenzied pace. But I guess if I really wanted to be a traditionalist, I could have been sitting in a rocker by the old pot belly stove this past winter, listening to music on the vintage Edison cylinder, or better yet, the old Victrola ... with my dog Nipper tucking his head under my blanket, trying to hide from that awful sound.

See you at the next Barn Dance show.

Comments? Please contact:

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Wellesley Ont. N0B 2T0
Phone: (519) 656-2552
E-mail: heywoods@golden.net

2008 Upcoming Events:

Date	Event Name	Place
Sunday, March 9	The Barn Dance Show	Heritage Theatre, Wingham Town Hall
Sunday, April 6	The Barn Dance Society Annual Meeting	Barn Dance Society Museum, Wingham - 1:00 pm
Sunday, April 13	The Barn Dance Show	Kirkton Community Centre
May 23, 24 & 25, 2008	11th Annual Blyth Campout Weekend	Blyth Recreation Complex & Campground
Saturday, June 28	Barn Dance Show / Dance	Stratford Rotary Complex
Sunday, October 19	The Barn Dance Show	Heritage Theatre, Wingham Town Hall

Continued from Page 1

selling over 60 million records. With his band 'The Brazos Valley Boys', Hank was known as the 'King of Western Swing'. A music industry leader, Hank's accomplishments included, the first music-based t.v. show to be broadcast in colour, the first artist to travel with sound & lighting systems, the first to record a live album, the first to record a live album in Vegas, and along with Frank Sinatra, the first artist to record in 7 consecutive decades. In 1989 Hank was inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame, and in '97 was inducted into the Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame.

I'm proud to say that one of Hank's song writing partners was our very own Lynn Russwurm. Lynn co-wrote about 5 or 6 songs with Hank Thompson including, Time Wounds All Heels, and I Cast A Lonesome Shadow (which has lately been released in Europe by the lead singer of the rock group, 'Depeche Mode') Hank's honky tonk style of 'Western Swing' was prevalent in his 1952 hit 'The Wild Side of Life'. His backup band, the 'Brazo Valley Boys' were voted the #1 Country Western band for 14 years in a row by Billboard magazine. After a brief retirement, Hank passed away in Nov. 2007 at the age of 82 from lung cancer. Hank will surely be remembered for his many contributions to the music business.

Since the early '70's, guitarist, Ray Benson of Paw Paw, West Virginia, has kept the 'Western Swing' music, alive with the group Asleep At the Wheel. They are one of my favourite bands, and are now based in Austin, Texas. They have won multiple Grammy Awards for some of their many recordings, including a 'Tribute to Bob Wills' with an all-star cast.

I've been fortunate to share the stage with a Vermont based 'Western Swing'

band called 'Rick & The Ramblers'. Yup, that's right, 'Western Swing' in little ol' Vermont. Led by Burlington Vermont native, Rick Norcross, the 'Ramblers' have been going strong now for a number of years. They are one 'hot' band when performing live and the musicians are some of the best in the business. Their brand of 'Western Swing' has garnered them a following in the north eastern states, with reviews that would rival the 'Texas Playboys'. They are a fun band, which is what 'Western Swing' music is all about. Rick tells me that they hope to release their 2nd c.d. sometime this year. Check them out at rickandtheramblers.com

'Western Swing' is alive and well in Canada too. The 'Bebop Cowboys' are known as purveyors of Fine Western Swing. Led by guitarist, Steve Briggs, these guys do 'Western Swing' justice to no end. Band member, Burke Carroll's lap & pedal steel playing are exceptional to say the least, and all other band members are of the highest calibre. Based in Toronto, the 'Cowboys' have 3 CD's to their credit, and have a busy itinerary throughout the year. They lean a bit towards the jazzier side of 'Western Swing' at times, but they know how to get a crowd up and dancin'. I've seen them play live and it's not uncommon for them to invite celebrity guest artists up on stage to perform. Check them out sometime, or go to bebopcowboys.com. They are credit to the 'Western Swing' genre' and about as authentic as you can get. Honourable mention to Canadian singer / song writer, Terry Sumsion, who has kept 'Western Swing' alive as well, with songs like 'The Loneliest Star in Texas' and 'Ida Red likes the Boogie.'

WHO WROTE THE SONG?

(You're the Only Star In My Blue Heaven)

You're the Only Star in My Blue Heaven was written by Gene Autry, and based on a true experience that developed while he was working on the National Barn Dance in Chicago. Autry found himself receiving love letters from a lady in Iowa whom he had never even met before. She developed a notion that Gene was just singing for her. Every letter Autry received reeked of perfume and the letter would begin with ... *Dear Gene: "I heard the song you sang to me last night, and I understood."*

Her family doctor worried about her health, even wrote to Autry asking if he would please reply and tell the lady that he didn't love her. Autry never answered, but her letters eventually stopped. But in her last letter she said, *"After hearing you sing Gene, I walked outside, stood on the porch and gazed at the sky. I looked at the stars in the heavens, and saw millions of them, ... but you're the only star in my blue heaven."*

It was from this letter that Gene Autry got the idea to write a hit song in 1935, "You're the Only Star in My Blue Heaven."

... And now you know who wrote the song.

RICK & THE RAMBLERS:

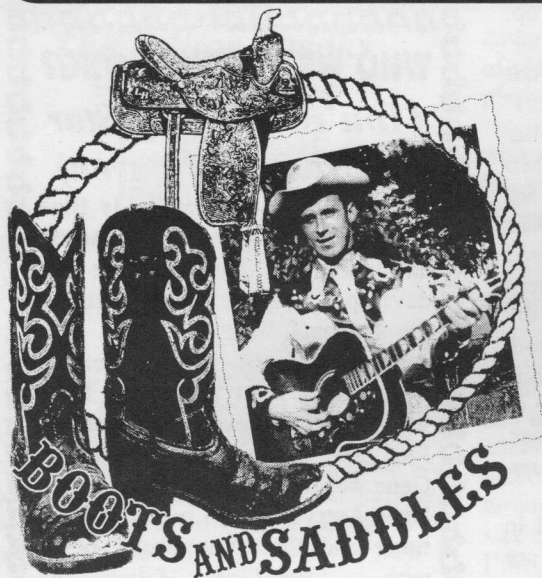
Rick Norcross, vocals, rhythm guitar;
Taryn Noelle, vocalist;
Dono Schabner, vocals, lead guitar;
Will Patton, mandolin;
Charlie MacFadyen, piano, accordion;
Chris Wright, vocals, bass guitar;
Rachel Bischoff, vocals, drums.



IN MEMORIAM



GORDON HARKESS of Clinton, Ont. passed away in February this year. Gordon was an early musician/performer on the CKNX Barn Dance stage, and was a supporting member of the Barn Dance Historical Society. He will be greatly missed by family, friends and all of us involved with the Barn Dance group. We have lost an entertainer and a friend. Our condolences to family and friends of Gordon.



by Lynn Russwurm

Some time ago, I featured Smiling Dick, The Saskatchewan Roamer in Boots & Saddles. His real name was D. W. Funk and at that time I asked if anybody could elaborate on this pioneer of Canadian country music. Just recently I issued a CD called "Lynn Russwurm's Canadian Country" on the British Archives of Country Music that was compiled from 78 RPM records in my collection. Included was a song by Smiling Dick, "I Long for the Old Home Again." One thing led to another and I was contacted by his brother's great granddaughter in Altona, Manitoba. She was looking for his records or even a tape. Apparently nobody in their family had anything of Smiling Dick's, and as I had all eight of his recorded songs on cassette I ran off a CD with the songs for her, as well as a copy of the BACM CD. It amazes me that no matter how obscure something may be, there is somebody out there who is looking for it. In this case it was family members and everything Smiling Dick had done had been allowed to slip through their hands, yet how important our heritage is to somebody.

Anyway this young lady filled me in on some more information on this pioneer of Canadian country music. His real name was Diedrich W. Funk, he was one of seven children of Peter and Helena Funk. Born in 1904 in Manitoba, but moved to Saskatchewan as an infant where he apparently stayed, even

after his parents moved back to Manitoba when Dick was 18. He learned to play guitar as a young boy and went on to sing on a Saskatchewan radio station and performed with a traveling variety show called "The Stella Dallas Show". Sometime in 1935 he managed to get to Montreal to record 8 sides for the Bluebird label. At that time RCA was looking to recreate the success they had with Wilf Carter in 1933 and recorded several artists in the same style, but couldn't duplicate their earlier Wilf hits until Hank Snow came along.

The family created a Peter Funk Family Tree Book so they've taken the right steps to ensure their place in Canadian history and it's really fulfilling to know that the younger generation is interested enough to keep their family spirit alive. I've had the same thing happen in my family where the wife of a cousin in British Columbia has undertaken this project and created a Family Tree book on my great grandfather and his descendants. What a treasure that book is for me and mine. By the way, I'm running a full page picture of Smiling Dick on the pictures page in this issue of the journal which was sent to me by this same young lady.

Which brings us back to the subject of my concern, the importance of our museum in keeping the memories of the pioneers alive. After all it's history and more important it's our history. I want my children and even my great grandchildren to know what I've done and where I've been and this was an important facet of my life that I want them to know about and appreciate. I know Earl Heywood felt this way and it became almost an obsession with Earl to further the work of our society and the function our museum plays in the scheme of things and it must not be allowed to fall by the wayside.

I realize personally how much work is involved in our project and I would like to see more people get in-

involved. How about some younger people standing to serve as members of the board of directors, surely there are some people out there that could volunteer time and effort and ease the work load on some of us who have been involved, possibly since the formation of our society. Maybe somebody who had a relative on the Barn Dance and would like to contribute toward that person's place in the sun. Or just somebody who enjoyed the music and wants to keep it alive. Whatever the reason we need more people to take up the reins when they will have to be passed on. Except for 1 year, I've been on the board of directors since it's inception and am now stepping down. I intend to keep involved in my writings, etc. but now at the age of 77, somebody else could hold down my chair as a director and come up with some new ideas to carry on our work. I've had some health problems and in the last few years including 2 bouts with cancer which have been cleared up, but I feel it's time to move on. I cannot under estimate the importance of our society and the work that has been done in the past and with your help will continue in the future.



THE HUMMINGBIRDS

*Lynn Russwurm, Lance Russwurm,
and Laura Russwurm*

TERRY SUMSION BENEFIT

A benefit for Canadian country star, Terry Sumsion will be held on Sun., April 27 at the Paris Fairgrounds. Terry is on the mend from a very serious operation recently. This is your chance to come out and support this great Canadian singer/songwriter, a man who never quits. There will definitely be lots of country musicians there to perform on Terry's behalf.

For more information, contact Helen Heimbecker at 519-756-7439.

BOOKING THE BARN DANCE

If you are interested in more information about booking the Barn Dance Musical Production, please write to:
Barn Dance Bookings, P. O. Box 68, Wingham, Ont. N0G 2W0; or call Wayne Otterbein, (home) (519) 235-4783, or (bus.) (519) 235-0559

BARN DANCE SOUVENIRS

- Souvenir Mugs - \$ 5.00 ea.
- CD - Vol. 1 \$15.00 ea.
- CD - Vol. 2 \$15.00 ea.
- CD - Vol. 3 \$15.00 ea.
- CD - Vol. 1, 2 & 3 \$40.00 set
- Cassette - Vol. 1 \$ 6.00 ea.
- Cassette - Vol. 2 \$ 6.00 ea.
- Cassette - Vol. 3 \$ 6.00 ea.
- Souvenir 1997 Calendar \$ 5.00 ea.
- Barn Dance Logo T-Shirts (gold logo on blue only)
- Sizes S, M, L, XL, XXL \$20.00 ea.
- NEW "Heywood Family Three Generations" CD \$20.00 ea.
- NEW Al Cherny CD - "Live / The Lost Recordings" \$15.00 ea.
- NEW Eleanor & Graham Townsend CD "The Talented Townsends" (36 unheard recordings) \$15.00 ea.
- Best of The Barn Dance CD \$15.00 ea.

All purchases include GST.

Please include \$3.00 per item for mailing or pick up at Ernie King Music.

LOOK FOR THE YELLOW VESTS

If you need information at this year's Blyth Jamboree, just look for our volunteers in the yellow vests. They'll be more than happy to help you out.

Canadian Country Music Festival

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Blyth Arena Complex, Blyth

May 23, 24, 25, 2008

Camping packages available for all events.

BLUEGRASS SHOW & OPEN STAGE
Friday, May 23, 2008 - 8p.m.

BARN DANCE SHOW & DANCE
Saturday, May 24, 2008 - 8p.m.

GOSPEL SHOW
Sunday, May 25, 2008 - 10a.m.

For further information & registration:
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519-530-8000 or www.thebardance.ca

Barn Dance Show & Dance Tickets available at the door.

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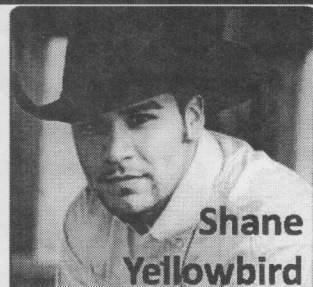
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Tickets just \$30 each

Country Music Memories

as compiled by Lynn Russwurm



"Smiling Dick" (Diedrich W. Funk)

'The Saskatchewan Roamer'

1904 - 1966

COUNTRY CALENDAR



by Doreen Brown

(Toronto and surrounding area)

* **Canada Day, July 1** - at R.C. Legion Br. 344, 1395 Lakeshore Blvd. W., Toronto, Magnum Band. There will be a live country band with Mel Aucoin; Bob Lucier and Friends. There is a giant BBQ, starts at noon until 7 p.m. For more info call Mary at the legion 416-532-8892.

* **17th Annual Classic Country Music Reunion** - Centennial Park, Trenton, July 31, Aug. 1, 2, & 3. Legends, pioneers and new frontiers reunion of the artists and history of Canada's country music. Main stage and beer garden with open mic and gospel show on Sunday. Pancake breakfast Sat. & Sun. in Centennial Park. For info e-mail ccmr1992@aol.com

* **The Auction Barn Jamboree/Jams/Dances** - Apr. 5, 13 & 27 - dance at Lion's Community Centre, Coburg 1 to 5; Aug. 28 - Sept. 1 - 4th annual jamboree, Keeler Centre, Colborne, includes open mic as well as stage shows each evening Thurs. to Sun. each day ending at 1 a.m. A large country gospel hour Sun. a.m. is performed. All country music musicians welcome to take part in this weekend. Camping. For info, contact Gary Warner www.auctionbarnjamboree.ca

* **Pete Walker**, music director and afternoon show host at KX 96FM in Oshawa reports that he will be hosting a karaoke night every Thursday at The Corral in Oshawa.

* **Bond Head Old Tyme Fiddlers Club**, community hall, Hwy. 27 & 88, musicians, singers, and dancers welcome. Following dates and every 4th Tuesday, April 22, May 27 and June 24.

* **Doc Walker Appearances** - at Cowboy's Ranch, London May 28; Peterborough May 29; Opera House, Orillia May 30; Danforth Music Hall, Toronto May 31.

* **Havelock Country Jamboree** Aug. 14 - 17 with appearances by Travis Tritt and

Juice Newton, Aaron Tippin, Tracy Byrd, The Good Brothers, Desert Heat and Dawn Langstroth.

* **Appearances by Micelle Wright** - Voyageur Days Inn, Mattawa July 25; Palmer Rapids Twin Festival July 26.

* **Aaron Lines (Alberta)**, will be appearing at Rim Park, Waterloo April 13; The Hammer Fair, near Sudbury July 19; Voyageur Days, Mattawa July 25.

* **Appearances by Doreen Brown**: Apr. 6 Warminster Legion; Apr. 13 Army and Navy, Orillia, Jamboree by Legend, Slim Celsie and Don Celsie at 1 pm; Apr. 23 Annual Blyth Campout Weekend; May 11 Moose Lodge, Brown's Line and Lakeshore Blvd.; June 8 Shelburne Community Centre; June 14 Weatherall Shed Jamboree.

* **25th Tottenham Bluegrass Festival** - with host Mike O'Reilly. Line up includes Michael Cleveland and Flamekeeper, Bluegrass Brothers, David Parmley and Continental Divide, Honi Deaton and Ream, Junior Sisk and Ramblers Choice, Spinney Brothers, Dick Smith, Mike O'Reilly Band, Gold Heart, Eddie LeBlanc and Friends, Hometown Bluegrass, Bill White and White Pine, Silverbirch, The Back Woodsmen, Level Crossing, Switchback Road, Honeygrass. Children's program, beef BBQ Sat. PM, gospel hour Sun., crafts and

concessions, food, souvenir clothing, bluegrass music and supplies. Info 1-888-BLUEGRAS or 905-936-4100 www.tottenhambluegrass.ca

* **Special Fund Raising** and Tribute to Terry Sumsion, April 27 in Paris. Info contact Helen at 519-756-7439.

* **Appearances by Deric Ruttan** - Apr. 8 Belleville; April 10 Owen Sound; April 12 Bracebridge; July 19 Del Cray Park, Peterborough.

* **Caledon East Jamboree** April 20, 1 p.m. Jamboree, musicians welcome, roast beef supper available. This will be the last jamboree until the fall.

* **Jamboree and Roast Beef Supper**, 4th Sunday of the month, RCL, Erin with music by the Dolsons.

* **Country Motion Band** appearing April 4 Sandy Cove 8 to 12; April 12 Straford Legion 8 to 12; April 26 Danube Center Bradford 2 to 5; April 27 Elmira Legion Supper and Dance 4 to 9; May 17 Guelph Legion 8 to 12; June 7 Warton Legion 3 to 6; June 14 Elmira Legion Arena Show.

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BARN DANCE CORNER

by Peter Saros

The three Rs of country music: radio, railroads and rambling.

So much of country music is rooted in them. So many roots have been torn out by them. They are the fundamentals, the reading, writing, and arithmetic of the genre. They are the emotional impulse, if not the actual pulse of the music.

One of the three is no more important than the other two. There is no pecking order. No hierarchy. It is impossible to determine cause and effect.

What I do know is you cannot have one without the others.

Rambling will lead to railroads as surely as listening to the radio will lead to rambling.

I guess we can blame Jimmie Rodgers. Maybe we should lay rambling responsibility at the feet of the Lord for creating Hank Williams? Hank Snow must be accounted for, no? That "Golden Rocket" sure sounded seductive to these ears. Or was it Merle Haggard's fault? He some-

how made me traveling down every road sound cool. Or maybe it was The Hag's fault for recording a tribute album of Jimmie Rodgers songs? But now we are back at the beginning again. We haven't gotten any where.

Or have we?

Isn't that the way of country music? Things coming around. Circles going unbroken. Life turning like a wheel. You get the point.

True, the closest I have come to hobbing is jumping a turnstile at Union Station in Toronto. I have only really ridden on a train-proper once in my life. Radio mattered in my youth but not in the world widening, geography shrinking way it mattered to rural American and Canadians in the 1930s and 40s. For me, it was a diversion, often just back ground noise.

But at some point I actually heard the music. I felt the pain and loneliness. The message anchored in the bone.

I now understand what is at the heart of the rambling man. I hear the siren-call of the clickety-clack every time a song makes me want to leave it all behind. It might not be steel wheels on steel rails, but I feel the pull. The song I

hear might not be on the radio anymore, and consequently everyone else isn't hearing the same song, but something is still being communicated. There is still a conversation going on between the artist and the listener.

Somebody is throwing that timeless message out there, and I am catching it.

Although the literal reality of radio, rail roads and rambling is not a part of my day-to-day reality, the emotional significance of them is. The message is still the same.

There is running side to me, but I will never act on it. I am a hopeless homebody. But some days I like to fantasize about the possibility of just putting my entire life in the rear-view mirror.

Now that I am older though, I hear the despair in Haggard's voice knowing he will have to travel down every road. He has no choice. Hank Williams moans about being a "ramblin' man." He was created that way. He has no option.

The songs I once thought were cool are now quite horrifying.

But just when I take consolation in the fact that I have the ability to choose family and home over the road and one more city, I hear that lonesome whistle whine.

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