

The Barn Dance Opera Journal

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Winter Edition

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FIDDLES OF THE BARN DANCE

Part Two by Lynn Russwurm

MEL LAVIGNE – Mel Lavigne was born in 1917, and played fiddle, sax and piano with great proficiency. He performed with several groups while with the Armed Forces in World War 2 and was as at home in a modern big band as in a country & western group. He joined the Barn Dance in 1950, where he really started to make a name for himself.

In 1951, he entered the first North American Fiddle Contest in Shelburne, though he was under threat of losing his job with the Barn Dance. However, when Mel walked off with first prize, he was welcomed back with open arms. I remember being at the Barn Dance in Tavistock that night, and the excitement among the cast when it was announced that Mel was the North American Fiddle Champion. He also went on to win again the next year.

In 1952, Mel left the Barn Dance to form his own band, the Blue Water Boys. Later, he built a summer resort at Honey Harbour that was a highly successful venture. However, Mel kept on entertaining throughout the years

and also had a long-running TV series out of Barrie, Ont. In retrospect, one drawback to Mel's career is that he never bothered to record. He tried to rectify this in the late eighties with a self-released album under the guidance of Earl Heywood at Ernie King's Studio in Wingham. Unfortunately, Mel is no longer with us.

AL CHERNY – Al Cherny didn't let any grass grow under his feet when he got a call in Alberta to come east for the Barn Dance. Al just packed up his fiddle and moved. Al liked to tell the story that they told him Wingham was near the border, so he figured he could hop across the border into the States whenever he wanted to. He was disappointed to find out that it was over 100 miles, which amounted to a major trip in those days.

Al had already recorded the "Orange Blossom Special" on the Aragon label with the Sons of the Saddle, and was a pretty hot fiddle player. However, when he came to Wingham, he found he was sadly lacking in jigs and reels, and he was tutored in the months following by Rossie Mann in this style of fiddle. Al was a keen learner. After

his stint with the Barn Dance Gang, he joined the newly revitalized Golden Prairie Cowboys, along with Lucky Ambo on twin fiddles. Al was a real trouper and would do anything to entertain. I still remember that when Elvis Presley and rock and roll first came in, Al would sing things like "Hound Dog".

When Tommy Hunter went on radio for the CBC, he asked Al to join him. The association continued into The Tommy Hunter Show on CBC-TV, where Al was featured until his untimely death from cancer in 1989. He recorded extensively through the years with Arc, RCA, and TeeVee.

LUCKY AMBO – Lucky came from New Brunswick with the Golden Prairie Cowboys. When they breezed into Wingham, it wasn't long before Johnny Brent, manager of the Barn Dance, signed them up. However, their music was too revolutionary at the time for the people of Western Ontario, who were much more at home with the old time music they were used to. So, this hot band had a hard time fitting in. This is borne out by the fact that they broke up three times, reorganized, and eventually came back. Each time, Slim Boucher was the head honcho and

Lucky was with him. There were problems: Slim fired Lucky on more than one occasion because Lucky had a drinking problem that often got the best of him. As he was such a good musician and entertainer, he was always taken back into the fold. This problem followed Lucky throughout his lifetime, and kept him from fulfilling his potential.

Lucky recorded one album on Canatal, which is considered a real collector's item and is hard to find. Another measure of the man is



CKNX Barn Dance fiddler, Mel Lavigne, was the first fiddler to win the Shelburne Old Time Fiddle Contest.

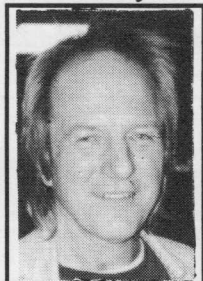


Fiddler, Al Cherny, with Gordie Tapp and Ken Ducharme on guitar. This picture was from the CKNX country music TV show, Western Roundup.

Continued on Page 3

The Editor Speaks

by Grant Heywood



2010!!! My, my, how fast a decade can fly by. I'm just glad to still be alive and kickin' these days. 2009 was a particularly bad year for me personally, as I saw way too many of my friends and musician friends pass away. I would normally say that it's because I'm starting to move up in years, but I hope this isn't about to become the norm.

As usual, I made my New Year's resolutions and started cutting back on the snacks, began planning an exercise routine, and have been trying to organize my priorities so that I can maximize my income and allow more time for myself and family. Some of the 'self help' people on television seem to have a plan that targets these very critical areas, and they seem to have all the answers with a permanent smile pasted on their face. Funny though, I'm convinced the only reason it works for them is because they've become an instant info-mercial celebrity. Kind of like the 'Sham Wow' guy or that Russell Oliver guy who will give you oodles of cash for your unused gold jewellery. They only have to get you once.

I do believe though, that you do grow wiser with age. I know for a fact that I will likely never attend a concert where the performers look like ants on stage, half the time they're lipsinging the lyrics, and the closest you'll see them is on the overhead jumbo screen after paying a ticket price that would have been better used as a down payment on my car. You won't see me lining up for the latest movie like I used to either. After paying for gas, refreshments and the ticket price, I could have rented my Top 10 favourite movies of all time and watched them on the BIG

SCREEN TV at home.

Dining out used to be one of life's little pleasures as well and I still go out with my wife on occasion. But standing in line at popular eating establishment and then being diverted to the drinking lounge for another 45 minutes doesn't really satisfy my gnawing hunger. I'm a patient guy but 15 minutes is the maximum wait time for me ... otherwise I'm out the door and wolfing down an Angus Burger at the local Harvey's.

I don't mean to get down on everything though. Some things have gotten cheaper ... like phone rates. But then that's trumped by that outrageous phone plan you pay for that much needed cell phone. An air compressor is one of the key tools at my day job and last year I got one at a half price sale. I couldn't believe it!! It worked great for about 6 weeks, then started making rumbling noises and eventually died. Yeah, I could pick up another cheap compressor but come on folks, I'm just throwing good money after bad and topping up the landfill site. Meanwhile, if I had purchased a better and more expensive compressor to begin with I wouldn't have the broken compressor collection that I now have stacked in my shed.

Getting back to reality, most people who are really happy, aren't burdened with material values ... they've likely got everything they need anyway. No, really, it's often the intangible things that make our life happy and complete. Like a good attitude, good friends, good health, and even listening to a good song. You can't hold the song in your hand, but when you listen, it gives you great satisfaction. I write songs and I

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know how it can have an effect on myself and others. Great music isn't exclusive and you can always hear great music every time you attend a Barn Dance show. And it won't cost you an arm and a leg either.

Comments? Please contact:

Grant Heywood

5584 Deborah Glaister Line,

R. R. #2,

Wellesley Ont. N0B 2T0

Phone: (519) 656-2552

E-mail: heywoods@golden.net

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,
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or call ~ (519) 530-8000

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2010 COMING EVENTS

Date	Event Name	Place
May 27 to 30, 2010	13th Annual Campout Weekend	Blyth Recreation Complex and Campgrounds
Sat., Aug. 28, 2010	Barn Dance Show and Dance	Hensall Arena, Hensall

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the fact that at one time or another, he was featured with many of the top groups of the day. He is pictured on the cover of albums by Dixie Bill Hilton & The Calgary Range Riders, Pete Brady & The Playboys, and The Sons of the Saddle. He was also a member of The Main Streeters of Hamilton at one time. When Country Hoedown featured a fiddle contest between two fiddlers every week, Lucky won it week after week for a period of time. Lucky tried to the end for that elusive comeback and died of a heart attack while back home in New Brunswick.

These are just thumbnail sketches of some of the greatest "Fiddlers of the Barn Dance." Apologies to any whom I might have missed. Hopefully, we can take a closer look at these great Canadian fiddlers on an individual basis at a later date sometime.

LARRY MERCY

BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION

A 70th birthday celebration was held in Waterloo recently for Larry Mercy. Many friends, family and musicians attended the invitational party with Larry and Ray singing some of the old Mercy Bros. songs.



It's always a rare treat when the legendary Ernie King makes an appearance on the Barn Dance stage. Ernie's youthful demeanor and friendly smile would almost be enough for most folks, but Ernie never fails to win over an audience with a song or two. Ernie did a rendition of 'It'll Come Back', a crowd favourite. And he's become quite the storyteller as well, but then he's been around the block a few times, so he's allowed to share his stories with others. He wouldn't have it any other way.

WHO WROTE THE SONG?

(King Of The Road)

It is estimated that *King Of The Road* has been recorded well over 300 times. Roger Miller, who wrote and recorded the tune, cashed in on over two and a half million in sales of the song. In 1964 Miller made music history by winning eleven Grammy awards over a two year period, an all time record. Originally from Texas and later Oklahoma, Roger Miller became one of the first country artists to make the successful leap to national television and to Las Vegas as well. Later in his career he even wrote the score for the Broadway musical hit, *Big River* and received a Tony Award.

When Roger Miller first arrived in Nashville, he worked as a fiddle player for Minnie Pearl, and later as a drummer for Faron Young, all the while he was writing songs on the side. After some of his songs were recorded by Ray Price, Patti Page and Ernest Tubb, he began to surface as a rising songwriter. In 1965 he recorded *Chug-A-Lug*, *Dang Me*, *Engine Engine #9*, and *King Of The Road*. These single releases became instant top 10 radio hits selling millions of records. Roger had teamed up with Buddy Killen of Nashville and it was Buddy that shopped Miller's songs and got him his record deal with RCA. Roger took Nashville by storm and was somewhat of a song writing genius many of his peers had said.

Miller also wrote hits for others in Nashville earlier in his career. He wrote *Tall Tall Trees* with George Jones, Jim Reeves had a #1 hit with the Roger Miller song, *Billy Bayou* and Ray Price went to #3 on the charts with *Invitation To The Blues*. Roger was a born entertainer and songwriter and had a corny intelligent wit. Other Roger Miller tunes he recorded were, *England Swings*, *Walkin' In The Sunshine*, *Kansas City Star*, and *Husbands and Wives*. There were so many songs that Roger Miller recorded that you almost lose track. kd Lang did a superb version of Miller's *Lock Stock and Teardrops* on one of her hit CDs.

Roger Miller once said, "It took me twenty years to become an overnight success". He died in the fall of 1992 from a long battle with lung cancer and was inducted post-humously in 1995 into the Country Music Hall Of Fame. He will always be remembered for his biggest career hit, *King Of The Road*.

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

NOTICE OF MOTION RE: BYLAW CHANGE

In hope of getting greater attendance at our Annual General Meeting in April, our Board of Directors would like to try a different time/date formula. However, since our bylaws presently stipulate that this meeting is to be held on the first Sunday in April, to hold it at any other date would require a bylaw change – the Board does not have the right to override our bylaws. Changes to bylaws can only be done at a General Meeting, and the proposed change must be spelled out in an issue of our official newsletter – *The Barn Dance Opera Journal*.

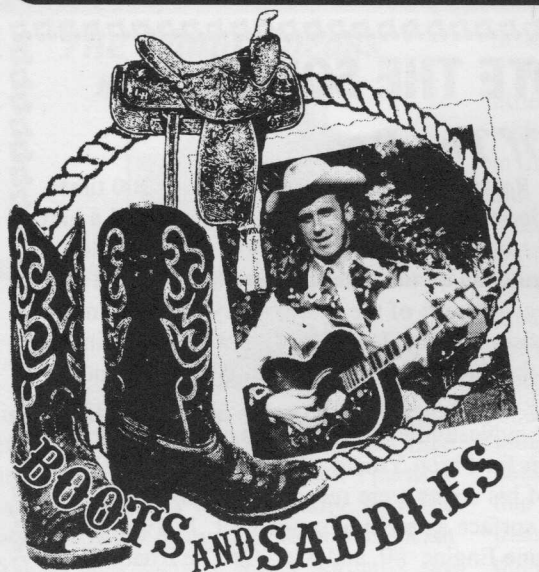
So we don't have to wait until the first Sunday in April to make a change, our Board has decided to designate the February Board Meeting as a General Meeting. The February Board meeting is scheduled for Monday, February 1, 2010, 7:00 PM at the Carson Auction Meeting Room on Highway 86, just south of Listowel. Any and all members of our Society are invited to attend. (In the event of a weather cancellation of this meeting, the March 1st Board Meeting, also at 7.00 PM at Carson's will be designated as a General Meeting.)

I am proposing the following bylaw change:

Article 3, Section 1: Delete the first sentence of the present wording ("The Annual Meeting of the Society shall normally be held each year on the first Sunday in April"), and replace with the following: "The Annual Meeting of the Society shall be held each year in April; date, time and location shall be decided on a yearly basis by the Board of Directors".

(Some different wording can be voted in at the General Meeting.)

Submitted on behalf of the Board by Ron Coulthard, Secretary.



by Lynn Russwurm

As I write this there are snowflakes falling and it looks very much like a white Christmas will be with us. So much has happened in the past year that is worthy of a bit of reminiscing. Foremost in my mind is the passing of Lorne Prince. Lorne was associated with me in the Jamboree Reunion Band for the past 15 years, leaving many musical memories. The Jamboree Reunion Band was the outgrowth of our first Jamboree Reunion held at Bingeman Park in 1985. After that heady experience I gathered together what I felt was the best band I had the pleasure of working with in my whole career. With Lloyd Bank on steel guitar, Victory Pasowisty on fiddle, Bill Mankiss on accordion, Lorne Prince and myself alternating on stand-up bass and rhythm guitar, along with various drummers, we performed on some of the Barn Dance Reunions that Earl Heywood organized, as well as Palmer Rapids and River Valley Festivals and numerous dances and festivals.

When I first arrived in Kitchener in 1949, one of the first bands I heard was Don Reinhart's Tumbleweed Troubadours at the Bridgeport Casino. Young Lorne Prince was already a seasoned performer and bass player with this group which appeared every Friday night at the Casino, and many a time I enjoyed the music of this excellent group. From there I followed Lorne's career throughout various musical aggregations in the Kitchener area until 1985 when we began to work together in the Jamboree Reunion Band. All these things would just be memories, but we have a very tangible reminder of those days in the album we recorded, called simply The Jamboree Reunion Band. To this

end, I would advise any band to record, if at all possible. When you play a gig, after the night is over, so is the music, but if you put it down in a recording, it will be a treasure for the rest of your life.

Last time around, I mentioned the new bluegrass association that had been formed in Kitchener, well the Thursday night jams at the Army & Navy Club on Gage Street are now in full swing and are attracting some fantastic pickers to the area. I've attended most of these nights and can say I truly enjoy them. There are semi-professional pickers, as well as back porch pickers that play only for the enjoyment that well played music can bring. If

you get the chance, be sure to come out and bring your axe with you, you will be welcomed. No electric instruments, and no drums allowed.

Another local establishment that deserves mention is Paul Weber's Commercial Hotel in Maryhill. The Commercial is about the only country music hotel left where you can go to hear live country music. Remember the days when you could go to any country hotel on a Friday or Saturday night and enjoy some great music, country-style, well The Commercial is about the only one still in existence. And Thursday night is "Open Mic" night, hosted by Paul and his sister Sue, and anybody else who wants to get up and join in. Every second Tuesday night is Western Swing night, that has some of the hottest Western Swing music in captivity. These musicians come out to play the Bob Willis type of music that you can't hardly find anywhere anymore. The night I was there Pee Wee Charles was on steel guitar, of course you

remember him with Gordon Lightfoot and with Ian & Sylvia for many years, this is the caliber of entertainment you will find at the Commercial every second Tuesday night. Come on, Grant, when are we going out there again??

My old friend Stan Taylor is among this year's inductees of the New Brunswick Hall of Fame. Stan is a native of Nova Scotia and came to Kitchener in 1950 and in 1951 was with me and the Karges Sisters on radio station CKCR. After a stint in the army he relocated to the US where he worked with The Smiley Willette Show. Back in Canada, he joined Smilin' Ernie Lindell out of Barrie, which included a daily TV show. Coming back to Kitchener, Stan spent some time with the Silver Bar Ranch Boys, then with the Rhythm Masters as the house band at the Edison Hotel in Toronto. This band included Rusty Walker, Carl Kees, Fred Emberson and Will Hawks, what a band this was. Then the call came from Vic Mullen to join him in Nova Scotia for a new CBC-TV show, "Countrytime" to broadcast every Saturday night following the NHL Hockey game. Then followed club dates with his own group, a cross Canada tour with Tommy Common and then a hiatus from the music scene. After driving a truck for a number of years, Stan is back playing around the Maritimes in his retirement years. Stan now joins Kidd Baker, Ned Landry and many more in the New Brunswick Hall of Fame, a fitting climax for a great all around country musician.

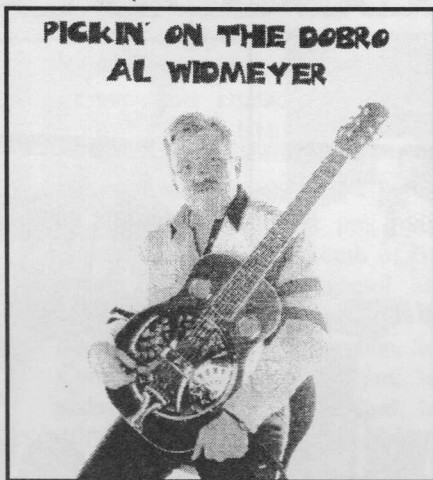


Ruby and Stan Taylor. Stan is inducted into the N.B. Country Hall of Fame.

FEATURE C. D. REVIEW

'PICKIN' ON THE DOBRO' – (AL WIDMEYER)

This is Al's 2nd solo CD effort and this one is jam packed with many standard favourites as well as a few standout tracks. Al is a versatile performer having played with Joe Firth & The Promised Land, The Dixie Flyers, special guest performances on the Barn Dance stage and most recently touring and recording with Canadian legend Stompin' Tom Connors. This recording is released by Rosedale Music in Newmarket and features fiddle and production by Al's good friend Randy Morrison. It is often said 'less is more' and in this particular situation with just Al and Randy at the helm, it's a treat just to hear them trade off licks and compliment each other's respective instrument without overpowering one another.

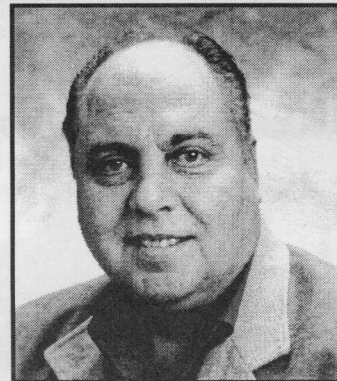


Al has come a long way since first playing the dobro and it shows on these 16 tracks. Some of the highlights include a beautiful waltz number called Jennifer's Waltz. Long Road To Aspen showcases guitar, dobro and mandolin. Randy Morrison puts the twin fiddle touch on traditional numbers like Faded Love and one of my favourites, Westphalia Waltz. Al proves he's no slouch on the quick-paced Fireball as he leads off on dobro and is followed by some expert pickin' to keep things rolling. Maiden's Prayer has been a standard in Al's repertoire for many years and is like a pair of comfortable slippers. Traditional standards like Maple Sugar, Have I Told You Lately and I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry, feature steel guitar, acoustic pickin', and mandolin, just to change things up a bit. Hound Dog Ramble is one of the standout dobro tracks, as well as the classic treatment on I Fall To Pieces.

Most songs on this c.d. are geared for the traditional country music listener and pickers alike. It would have been an added bonus if Al had a guest vocalist or even sung a tune himself on a couple of the numbers. Even an odd riskier tune would have added a little spice to the melting pot, but then again painting outside the lines doesn't always work. All in all, or should I say... Al in Al, this is a well rounded c.d. showcasing Al's dobro guitar expertise. It's a safe recipe that Al knows very well and is shared by the sweet sound of Randy Morrison on fiddle, with some topnotch steel and electric guitar mixed in for good measure.

(Have a C.D. you want reviewed, please contact the Editor.)

IN MEMORIAM



It was with great sadness to hear that Wayne Gordon Riehl of R. R. 1, Sebringville passed away peacefully at the Stratford Hospital, on November 17, 2009 at the age of 66. A true friend to so many, Wayne leaves behind his friend of many years, Karen Sauder of Waterloo; daughters Sheila and husband Rob Scott and their 3 children, from Quispamsis, NB, and daughter Jean Cranshaw and husband Rene and their daughter, from Chilliwack, BC. Also, brother-in-law Laverne Richardson and his family.

Wayne's fiddle was his passion. He loved to perform and appeared on CKNX television as well as several Barn Dance shows. Wayne formed the popular band called the Country Versatiles. The band has played for several years and has many dedicated fans who travel great distances to hear them perform. Now led by Gerald Davidson, the Country Versatiles will carry on, but with Wayne now gone it will certainly be hard to fill the void that he has left. Wayne always had a cheerful smile and sometimes played bass guitar, but he was at his best when he was playing fiddle. Always ready to fill a musical request by his many fans, there was hardly a fiddle tune that Wayne couldn't play. His fiddle talent knew no boundaries and his friendly disposition garnered him the respect of so many musicians and friends alike.

Predeceased by his only sister, Margaret Richardson and nephew Randy Richardson, Wayne was laid to rest beside his late mom and dad, at the St. John's Lutheran Church cemetery in Wartburg. Wayne will be especially missed by many, many friends and family, as well as the Barn Dance Historical Society. He will forever have a song in our hearts.

The Christmas spirit came alive when Barn Dance emcee, Jim Swan turned into father Christmas and young Bronte Hunter melted hearts with a recitation and song at the Palmerston Christmas show. Bronte has made several appearances on the Barn Dance stage and is always one of the crowd favourites. It was a rare performance when both Bronte and Naomi sang a Christmas duet later on that evening. Bronte continues to perform throughout Southwestern Ontario and will no doubt be returning to the Barn Dance stage again real soon.



Country Music Memories



Ramblin Ross and The Homesteaders. From left to right: Steel guitar, Gord Mathons; Fiddle, Ray Jackson; Lead guitar, Fred McGrath; Bass, Gordie Bye; Drums, Bob Hudson; Ross Allen in front.

Photo courtesy of Ross Allen



Smiley Bates, Slim Gordon and Rosemarie St. John while on tour with Hank Snow.

Photo courtesy of Jack Gordon

Christmas Barn Dance Party in Palmerston



Lindsay Taylor and Buddy Carlton put on a stellar performance at the Barn Dance Christmas Show in the Norgan Theatre, Palmerston. Lindsay and Buddy have performed all over North America including Nashville, and have many recordings to their credit. Lately, Lindsay Taylor has been honoured to have her picture on the label of the newly introduced Pinot Noir wine, 'Dock of the Bay', by Joseph Estate Wines of Niagara-On-The-Lake, Ontario. It is hoped that a new ad campaign for 'Dock of the Bay' wine will include a recording release duet of Lindsay & Buddy singing an original tune based around the wine label picture. This is a concept idea to help promote the highly rated wine with a high profile artist. Representatives from Joseph Estate Wines were at the recent Barn Dance performance in Palmerston to give away a wine package as a door prize.



Naomi Bristow was a special guest performer at the Barn Dance Palmerston Christmas show. Naomi has had a great year with her first c.d. release as well as many tour dates. She attended a festival in New Mexico, U.S.A. and won the award for Youth Yodeler of The Year from the Western Music Association. Naomi is gearing up for a busy 2010 and will be kicking off the new year with a showcase performance at the Royal York Hotel, Toronto, in mid-February accompanied by Barn Dance alumni.

COUNTRY CALENDAR



by Doreen Brown

(Toronto and surrounding area)

* **The Auction Barn Jamboree**, Cobourg Legion, 136 Orr St, upstairs, features guests as follows: Jan 10 - Mike Pollard; Jan. 24 - Gerald Davidson; Feb. 14 - Kiley Joe Masson; Feb. 28 - Kristin Scott.

* **Not too Soon** to make note of the Annual Barn Dance Campout, Blyth, Ontario, May 27 to 30, 2010.

* **Appearances by Terry Sumsion** - Jan. 10, Troy United Church, performance part of the church service, 11 am, Troy, Ontario; Jan. 17 - 2 pm concert, Victoria Hall, 55 King St. W., Cobourg, contact 1-905-372-2210 or 1-888-COBOURG, ext. 4153; Jan. 24 - Purple Hill Dance Hall, Terry Sumsion Trio, 2 pm, contact George Taylor, 519-461-0538. Note to you, Terry - 2nd Friday, Brantford Park Inn, *pleased you're feeling better and back on the country music scene.*

* **Jamboree** - third Sunday of the month, Waterford Legion 3 to 7. No meal.

* **Second Sunday** - Jamboree at Courtland Community Centre, 1:30 to 7 pm.

* **Every Sunday** - Brantford Army and Navy Club, 2 to 5 pm, meal.

* **Second Friday** - Brantford Park Inn, Best Western, open mic, 8 to 12, open stage. Contact Dave Jensen.

* **The Country Versatiles** with Gerald Davidson, appearing as follows: Jan. 3, Feb. 7 and Mar. 7 Jamboree, open mic, Centennial Hall, 39 Main St., Princeton, 1:30 pm; Jan. 9, Feb. 7, Mar. 6 and April 4, Danceland, Lakeside, 8 to 12 pm; Jan. 16, Feb. 20, Mar. 20 and Apr. 3, Wyoming Legion, 495 Erie St., Wyoming, 8 to 12 pm; Jan. 30, Listowel Agricultural Hall, Listowel, 8:30 to 12:30 pm; Feb. 21 and Mar. 21, Brussels Legions, 620 Turnberry St., Brussels, 7 to 11 pm; Feb. 27, Brodhagen Community Centre, 8 to 12 pm; Feb. 28, Cobourg Legion, 136 Orr St., 1 to 5 pm; Mar. 27, Elora Legion, 110 Metcalf St, 8 to 12 pm; Mar. 28, Wingham Legion,

183 Victory St, 7 to 11 pm; Apr. 9, Clinton Legion, 95 Kirk St, 8 to 12 pm. For further info www.countryversatiles.com

* **For upcoming Bluegrass Get Together Jams** contact Terry Calvert at Tee Cal blueskybluegrass-club@rogers.com

* **Upcoming Jamborees** - 1st Sunday at St. Marys Legion, 1 pm, roast beef dinner; Scotland Jam, south of Burford, every Friday night; Ingersol Masonic Hall, pot luck every Friday, 7:30 to midnight; every Tuesday afternoon, Seaforth Community Centre, 1 to 4 pm; 3rd Saturday Elora Legion dance; 2nd, 3rd, and 4th Tuesday at 7 pm at Burlington Legion.

* **Bluesky Bluegrass Club Jams** at the Village Inn, Queen's Lounge, Thornton, Thursdays, 7 to 10 pm.

* **Appearances by Doreen Brown** - Warminister Jamboree, 1st Sunday of month; Rosemont Community Centre, 3rd Tuesday; Shelburne Community Centre, 2nd Sunday; Holland Landing, 3rd Thursday.

* **Locations for Country Music** as follows: Hollywood on the Queensway, Toronto, 1184 The Queensway, 416-251-1269; Hugh's Room, 2261 Dundas St. W., Toronto, 416-531-6604; Little Bit of Home Pub and Grill, 2961 Lakeshore Blvd., Etobicoke, 416-253-4461; Noah's Ark, 2777 Danforth Ave., Toronto, 416-690-6222; Army Navy Club, 765 Third St., Mississauga, 905-274-9981; RCL, 456 Hensel Circle, Br. 582, Mississauga, 905-277-2902; Corral, 433 Simcoe St. S., Oshawa, 905-571-1422; Twisted Kilt, formerly Bow and Arrow, 1954 Yonge St., Toronto; RCL Waterdown. Some of the following artists have or do appear above: Cliffy Short, DJ Wayne Aggie, McPhee and Gary Gale; Mustang; Dave Whalen and the Starlites; Mickey Andrews and Mary MacIntyre; Joe Tucker and Second Wind; Dan McVeigh; Sandy McIntyre and Steeped in Tradition.

* **Best Wishes** to Michael T. Wall on his upcoming trip overseas to Beijing, China and other places; and please extend gratitude to the European DJs who play our country music.

* **Dance to Country Music** by the Dolsons, the 4th Sunday every month at the Erin Legion 1 to 5 pm Roast beef

dinner available. Guest artists.

Thank you to all the new members who have joined the Barn Dance and those who attended for the first time in May. Your valuable presence and support to this organization and all the artists is deeply appreciated. To all readers who have read my column for the past 13 years, also thank you for your input and support. A very happy, healthy country music 2010.

BARN DANCE JOURNAL
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BARN DANCE CORNER

by Peter Saros

One theme I try to write to in every column is tradition. It may be the specific traditions of the Barn Dance or the larger traditions of country music in general.

Tradition is born in the past. I search for it in the present. And I hope the future honours the past.

It is neat little circle of influence perfect to the Christmas season.

Recall that Scrooge promised he would learn the lessons the spirits of the past, present and future had to teach.

I like to believe Christmas music offers similar lessons from yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

For some there is no greater misery than suffering through tired old Christmas carols. I happen to love them. That they are overexposed is not their doing. Charge the advertisers who do their deeds of commerce and greed in the name of Christmas on themselves and not the gorgeous songs!

As much as anything I love their ability to simply endure and inspire. Year

after year we return to the same songs. Nostalgia is a huge factor. Many of the most familiar tunes are as comfortable as a log fire burning down on a quiet Christmas Eve. There is a subtle magic to the traditional standards.

I think of the songs as old friends. Every season the old friends are introduced to new ones as another generation of musicians tackles them. I am thrilled when artists I love announce an upcoming Christmas album. Cynics cry foul and point out Christmas albums are purely a money grab. I respond, "Bah! Humbug!"

Fans knew they were in for a treat when John Berry, Trisha Yearwood, Vince Gill and Raul Malo cut their yuletide favourites. Nat King Cole, Bing Crosby and Andy Williams suddenly had country crooning company. That shouldn't have surprised anyone. In each case a great voice and brilliant songs were well met.

I thrill, as well, at artists who choose to record original seasonal material.

It really is the ultimate challenge to write a non-clichéd country Christmas

song. Both genres are so easily abused. Red Simpson cut a 1973 holiday trucker album. Keith Whitley co-wrote "There's New Kid in Town" with Curly Putnam and Don Cook in 1985, perhaps the closest thing new country music has to a festive classic. Toby Keith released a refreshing collection of songs on 1995's *From Christmas to Christmas*. Mary Chapin Carpenter's 2008 *Come Darkness, Come Light* was softly beautiful. This year's offering from Sugarland, *Green and Gold*, offers excellent new material.

In the end, it all comes down to a singer and a song during one of the most magical and wondrous times of the year. If one is to keep Christmas well, it has to be done, at least in part, through song.

Listen to those old songs again with new ears. Hear the new songs with a changed heart. And know that same inspirational bright star will still shine next year.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

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