

The Barn Dance Opera Journal

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Spring Edition

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Al Widmeyer ... Country Music ... & Stompin' Tom

by Grant Heywood

Some people are lucky enough to play in one or two bands and maybe play a couple of instruments and sing. Al Widmeyer is an anomaly in that department. Born in Hanover, Ont., Al got his foothold with the *John Ham Band* from London. It wasn't long before he made his mark with the infamous bluegrass band *The Dixie Flyers*. He continued playing the circuit and touring with the likes of *Paul Weber & Top Hand*, *Joe Firth & The Promised Land*, *The BW Pauley Roadshow*, *Carl Kees & The Golden Fiddle Music Co.*, *The Country Versatiles* and *Stompin' Tom Connors*. That's a profound education in traditional bluegrass and country music that would undoubtedly take years of study at any college institution, and that doesn't even include many others that I've likely missed.

Al's wife, Sue, is the daughter of the late *Hughie Elder* of the *CKNX Ranch Boys & Barn Dance Band*. So if you're going to have a father in law it

might as well be someone you can take pride in looking up to. And if you're going to play a musical instrument, then you might as well try your hand at almost everything. Al is a fine dobro player, bass player and guitar picker. But he can also turn around and play fiddle, mandolin and steel if he puts his mind to it. He's been part of countless recording projects including, *Paul Weber*, *The Heywood Family*, and so many more. Al also had a big part in the last two *Stompin' Tom* CDs.

Al is a traditionalist when it comes to playing country music. He has a huge collection of music from Lefty Frizzel to his dobro idol, the late *Josh Graves*. It was the late *Ernie King* (*CKNX Ranch Boys*) who made the first custom 'King' dobro for Al. Back in the day when real country music was more prevalent, Al had a single titled '*Honky Tonk Saturday Night*' that got a lot of radio play. When he's not singin' and pickin', Al & Sue often take off to bluegrass jams and festivals in Canada and south of the border. And he usually ends up pickin' & singin' there anyway. It was on one of his trips to visit his pickin' buddy in Louisville, Kentucky that Al became an official Kentucky Colonel ya'll. Besides playing on the occasional Barn Dance, Al also received the Barn Dance Pioneer Award.

Needless to say, Al caught the attention of the late Canadian legend, *Stompin' Tom Connors*. Al became part of the band but even more important-

ly, he became a very good friend of the legendary icon. Al has done approximately 4 cross Canada tours with Tom including the Calgary Stampede, the Ottawa Scotiabank Centre and many other high profile venues. Tom Jr. was *Stompin' Tom's* road manager and they all travelled in a couple of Chevy Suburbans. *Stompin' Tom* shared the values of the common man in his music and when I asked Al about the accommodations on many of their road tours, Al told me they usually stayed in cheap, but clean motels. Nothin' fancy, and that's just the way Tom wanted it.

I've heard the stories about Tom from previous tours and bands when he would stop the vehicles somewhere out in farm country Saskatchewan and set up the equipment and play in an adjacent wheat field just for the hell of it. But Al wasn't about to let me in on too much of that. Safe to say that there was always a lot of Moosehead beer on every tour and there was always one roadie designated to

Continued on Page 3



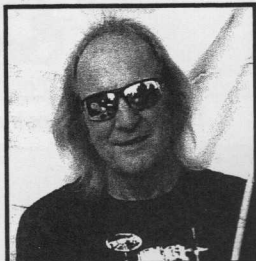
Al Widmeyer



Stompin' Tom Connors and Al Widmeyer

The Editor Speaks

by Grant Heywood



I'm still thawing out from that brutal winter we just came through. No doubt any snowbirds who decided to stay home will have second thoughts about that next winter. Aaaah Canada ... don't you just love it. It's either too cold or too hot. Right now I'll take the heat. LOL

We're just starting to 'gear up' for the 2014 Barn Dance season. You can check out the latest upcoming shows in the Barn Dance Schedule in this issue. Traditional country music is mostly what the Barn Dance is all about. Carrying on a tradition from the original CKNX Travelling Barn Dance Shows that date back to the 40's and 50's, the Barn Dance Historical Society aims to keep traditional country music alive and support the Barn Dance Historical Society and Entertainment Museum located in Wingham, Ontario.

It will be extra special this year when the Travelling Barn Dance Show appears at the Wingham Homecoming on Sun-

day, August 3rd. Many of our star performers will be making an appearance along with some of the originals from the Barn Dance era. We're hoping that you can make it out to one of our Barn Dance performances this season as well. After this past winter, nothing could be better than being entertained with first class Canadian talent at a Barn Dance show. Hope to see you at the next Barn Dance

Comments? Please contact:

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or send a message on facebook.

The Barn Dance Historical Society and Entertainment

Museum

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(or leave a message)

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May 22nd, 2014 - Campers Jam
May 23rd, 2014
Bluegrass Show & Open Stage
May 24th, 2014
Barn Dance Show & Dance
May 25th, 2014 - Gospel Show

full details & schedule online at
www.thebardance.ca

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2014 COMING EVENTS

Date	Event Name	Place
Sun., April 27	Barn Dance Show	Melville Presbyterian Church, Brussels
Sun., May 4	Barn Dance Show - 2:00 p.m.	Purple Hill Country Hall, Thorndale
May 22 - 25	17th Annual Campout Jamboree	Blyth Arena and Campgrounds, Blyth
Sun., June 22	Barn Dance Show - 3:00 p.m.	Commercial Tavern, Maryhill
Sun., August 3	Barn Dance Show	Wingham Homecoming, Wingham Community Complex
Sun., October 19	Barn Dance Show - 2:30 p.m.	St. Anne's Church Hall, St. Thomas

Continued from Page 1

keep the supply topped up and cold. On the last tour with *Stompin' Tom*, Al got to play with one of the original band members of Tom's band, Mickey Andrews. Mickey played slide/steel guitar, and was responsible for such sound effects as the police siren on 'Bud the Spud'.

I asked Al which *Stompin' Tom* songs were his favourites ... he said "all of them". One of Tom's favourite songs was 'These Men With Broken Hearts'. Al was with Tom a lot and visited him at his house on a regular basis. He told me some of the most memorable moments (other than being on stage with 'the man') was being featured with the Stanley Cup, when Tom was honoured with his likeness on a Canadian postage stamp, and just playing to appreciative Canadian audiences at large venues.

It was a major blow to Al when Tom passed away on March 6th, 2013. Al was taken aback by the huge outpouring from everyone across Canada at Tom's televised funeral. Al was especially proud to be onstage with fellow bandmate Tim Hus who honoured Tom with a song that sad day.

These days, Al still follows his musical journey as a band member at the Purple Hill Country Shows, and every 2nd Wed. night playing bluegrass at Paul Weber's Tavern in Maryhill. Often times you can catch him as a featured performer or just 'one of the guys' in any bluegrass or country band, onstage or in session ... or just driving bus for KW Transit. But I do know that Al will always have fond memories of his stint with his good friend *Stompin' Tom*. I asked him if Tom ever said anything that stuck in his head. "Oh yeah", Al said, "I'll never forget when Tom said to me ... You know Widmeyer, I wish I'd known you a long time ago." What more can you say.

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DON'T FORGET

Mon., April 7, 2014

**The Barn Dance
Historical Society's
Annual General Meeting**

Starting at 7:00 p.m. at the
Barn Dance & Entertainment Museum,
273 Josephine Street, Wingham, Ont.
*All members are invited to attend, vote
and participate in committees.*

See you there!!

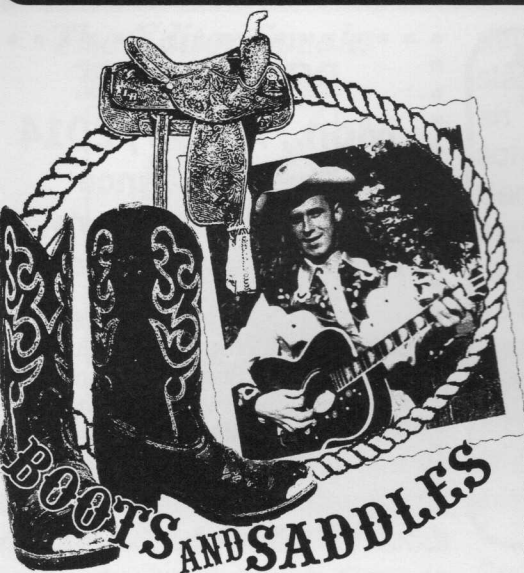
BARN DANCE MUSEUM

A visit to the Barn Dance Museum shows people the rich musical history of the area through the years. Some artists who performed on the Barn Dance went on to both national and international fame. The Barn Dance Museum first opened in the Wingham Armouries in April 1996. In seven short years the museum outgrew its first home and was moved to the present location during 2003 in the basement of the North Huron Museum at 273 Josephine Street, Wingham. In the nearly two decades of operation exhibits have come to include many items connected with artists who performed on the Barn Dance both in the past and present, CKNX radio and television, in the Wingham area and Southwestern Ontario in general. A recent addition is the Jimmy Phair display of stage clothing, photos and CDs. There is stage clothing worn by the Ranch Boys, Earl and Martha Heywood, Wayne Riehl, as well as other performers. Gold records presented to the Mercey Brothers and Al Cherny and the first Shelburne Fiddle Contest cup presented to Mel Lavigne are among the unique items on display. Musical instruments such as acoustic guitars, steel guitars and fiddles used during the careers of some of the musicians are exhibited. Photos show many of the area performers. The museums are open regular hours during the summer months and may be visited by appointment at other times of the year.



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by Lynn Russwurm

Looks like winter is almost over, what an old-fashioned winter it's been. I'm really looking forward to warm weather, outdoor concerts and everything that goes with it. I've got my summer concerts for Sunday evenings in Maryhill all lined up. This year we're going to concentrate more on the country side with a lot of new bands coming in. The schedule is as follows, all shows are 7 to 9 p.m. on Sunday nights: -

- June 1 - Randy Morrison & Flatt River
- June 8 - Earl Fries (Earl is coming back to entertaining after a period of inactivity)
- June 15 - Rescue Junction (award winning bluegrass-gospel)
- June 22 - Rural Appetite (returning from last year)
- June 29 - The Muir Family (also returning from last year)
- July 6 - Paul Weber - with family & friends
- July 13 - Peace River Band (bluegrass from Niagara Falls)
- July 20 - Ridin' High - from Woodstock
- July 27 - The Two Plus Who (Bob Tremblay and Lynn Russwurm with guests)
- Aug. 3 - Steve Parkinson & Stony Lonesome (country from Kitchener)
- Aug. 10 - Southbound (also new this year)
- Aug. 17 - Steve Pittico & South Mountain (award winning guitarist with South Mountain, fresh from a European tour)
- Aug. 24 - The Two Plus Who (with special

cial guests)

Aug. 31 - Hometown Bluegrass (new this year)

I've been attending the bluegrass concerts at the Galt Legion and I've been impressed by the high caliber of bluegrass that have appeared at these venues. Every winter Tony DeBoer from River Valley Bluegrass festivals has been setting up three series of bluegrass concerts in Feb., Mar. and April, bringing in top bluegrass groups for about a week each time, including the Cambridge stop.

While the April concerts are yet to come, the February concerts with The Crowe Brothers from the U.S. were great concerts but with low attendance, due to bad weather.

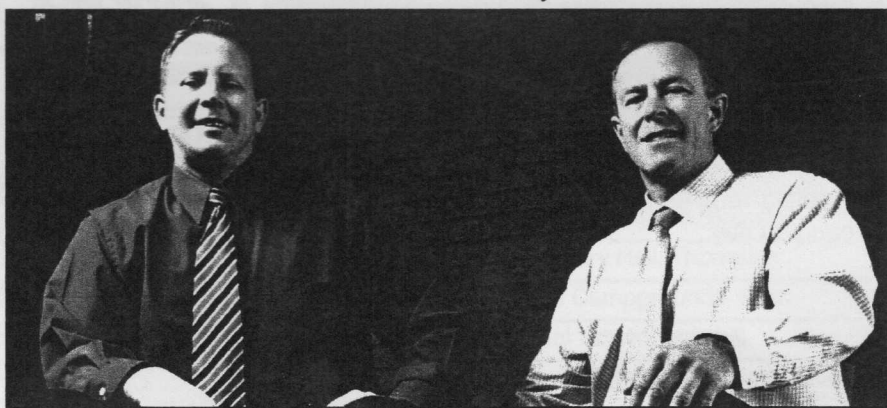
However the March concert with The Spinney Brothers from Nova Scotia was well attended and what a great concert that was. In my books the Spinney Brothers gave the best performance I've ever seen in bluegrass. Musicianship, they showed that bluegrass doesn't have to be played at break-neck speed but they also showed that they can. Brothers Allan on guitar and Rick on 5-string banjo don't have to take a back seat from anyone. Spotlighting their beautiful 4-part harmonies, assisted by mandolinist Gary Dalrymple and bassist Terry Poirier, who incidentally is a son of Canadian bluegrass legend Eddy Poirier. What also sets them apart is their adaptation of country music, songs of Marty Robbins, Merle Haggard, etc. I really enjoyed their rendition of "I want My Dog Back"

which was written especially for them by Tom T. Hall. This song is included on one of their CDs which are released Stateside by Mountain Fever Records in Virginia.

Opening acts for both concerts were also excellent with Rescue Junction doing the honours in February and Unseen Strangers opening for The Spinney Brothers.

The April concert will spotlight Larry Efav and The Bluegrass Mountaineers from the U.S. Of special interest will be the opening act of The Commercial Bluegrass Band. These guys are an all-star band that was formed to play at Paul Weber's Commercial Tavern in Maryhill every second Tuesday and have also performed at other venues. The band consists of Al Widmeyer on dobro and flat-top guitar, Al is versatile on many stringed instruments and performed for a number of years with Stompin' Tom Connors; Dicky Dugal on flat-top guitar and vocals and travels with Randy Morrison and Flatt River, as well as with country band U-Turn; Glenn George on stand-up bass, Glenn is a member of the bluegrass band, The Barn Katz and country band, Rural Appetite; Dan Howlett on fiddle, a chore he also handles with the Western Swing Authority; and Ken Groomes, award winning banjo player with Traditionally Wound. By the way, Glenn is also president of the Waterloo-Wellington Bluegrass Association.

Be sure to hear these guys at the Galt Legion or at the Commercial Tavern in Maryhill.



The Spinney Brothers - Rick and Allan

All Aboard for RESCUE JUNCTION

By Lynn Russwurm

Growing up in a home where Southern gospel music was the music of choice, Kyle and Kaitlyn Gerber were well grounded in music when the opportunity came to pick up their respective instruments, mandolin and guitar, and embark on a musical journey of bluegrass - gospel music. It's a long way from Millbank to Goshen, Indiana, but this is where their musical tastes come together in the bluegrass idiom. Moving to Indiana for a five year sojourn with their family, Kyle and Kaitlyn's young brother and sister began to realize their dream. Kyle discovered the mandolin and Kaitlyn made use of the guitar she had been playing from a young age on. Laying the groundwork for a career, they spent the summer of 2008 in Nashville where Kyle learned lead vocals and arranging while Kaitlyn concentrated on song-writing.

I met this young couple when I filled in at Redwood Hill for a couple of gigs in Milton and was quite impressed with their professionalism. Since then I've heard nothing but praise for Rescue Junction.

In 2009, they set about putting together a group to complement their music. Roger Martin was added on 5-string banjo. He came from a musical family in Pennsylvania, married a Canadian girl and stayed in Canada to add his harmony vocals to the mix. After about a year of working as a trio, they added Dallas Roth on stand-up bass and Kaitlyn took up vocals to come up with some beautiful four-part harmonies. Dallas came out of a classical background. And now the sound is complete.

Demand for their services came from many areas. Churches and bluegrass festivals have kept the group quite busy. After being spotlighted at our Sunday morning gospel gathering in Blyth last year, they will be featured on our Friday night bluegrass concert.

In spite of a busy schedule, they found time to record 2 CDs of their music with much of the material coming from the pen of Kaitlyn Gerber. Their talents have been recognized by their peers in the bluegrass industry with nominations in several categories at last year's awards show at Deerhurst in Hunstville last fall. They walked away with a well-earned "Most Promising Group" award. When you see this group you will remember, "This is only The Beginning".

Barn Dance Signs Contract for Homecoming Show



Front row, l to r: Jay Stevens, Entertainment, Homecoming; Ruth Baxter, President, Barn Dance; Doug Dietrich, Show Manager & Music Director, Barn Dance.

Back row, l to r: Gord Baxter, Treasurer, Barn Dance; Jason Goodall, Chairman, Homecoming.

At a recent public meeting for the Wingham Homecoming 2014, the Barn Dance Society signed a contract for a Sunday, August 3 concert as part of the Homecoming's events. Show Manager and Music Director, Doug Dietrich thanked the Committee for allowing the Barn Dance to be part of the events celebrating the heritage of the town where the Barn Dance was born. He announced an exciting lineup for the show hosted by Master of Ceremonies, Jim Swan and the Barn Dance Show Band. Canadian Country Music Hall of

Fame members Larry Mercey and Marie Bottrell will headline the show along with Juno and CCMA award nominee Paul Weber, rising star Naomi Bristow, John and Geneva Heaman and Wingham's own Ballagh Bunch. The show will also feature Barn Dance originals Bruce Robertson, Ron Coulthard, Mary Elliott Huyzen and Lynn Russwurm.

For further info, check
www.thebardance.ca or
www.winghamhomecoming.ca



Rescue Junction - left to right, Kyle Gerber - mandolin, Roger Martin - banjo, Dallas Roth - bass and Kaitlyn Gerber - guitar.

Country Music Memories



BILL HALEY



ELTON BRITT

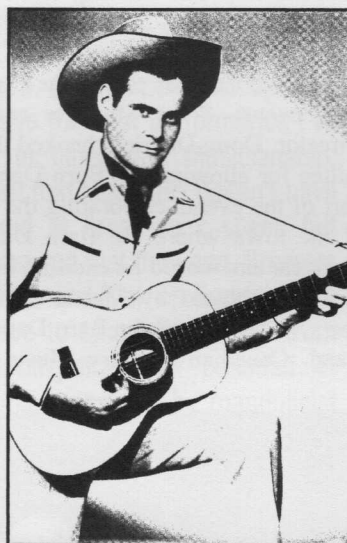


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COUNTRY CALENDAR



by Doreen Brown

(Toronto and surrounding area)

* **April 26** - Bluegrass Night, 7 to 12, Wroxeter Community Hall, with MC Dan Bieman.

* **April 27** - Barn Dance with Larry Mercey, Brussels.

* **June 13 - 15** - Hastings Trillium Country Jamboree, hosted by Al Traynor, music by Paul Evans.

* **June 19 - 22** - Grafton Country Jamboree.

* **Aug. 7 - 10** - Hitchin Post, Classic Country Jamboree.

* **The Algoma Wildflowers** - Gloria Hansen, Tammi Beeson, Cindy Minnick and Debbie French will be appearing: June 6-9, Bluegrass in the Country, Providence Bay on Manitoulin Island; June 20-22, Kakobeka Falls, Bluegrass Festival; July 3-6, River Valley Country and Bluegrass gathering.

* **June 20 - 21** - Vlley Heritage Radio is pleased to present Kevin Collins in the Ottawa Valley for two concerts. Pakenham June 20 and Eganville June 21. For tickets 1-888-532-9870 or 613-432-9873.

* **July 31 - Aug. 3** - Classic Country Music Reunion. Mitch Barker, Reg Benoit, Adrian Boudeau, Cheryl Casselman, Wendell Ferguson, Jackson Gartshore, Scotty Gartshore, Barb Grenier, Kiely Joe Masson, Ginny McIlmoyle, Bob McQuaid, Steve Pitocco, Dan Paul Rogers, Mary Rowan, James Ryce, Abby Stewart, Eileen Walsh, Neville Wells. Also featuring The Tim Sanders Band. Sound Doug Deveaux.

* **Caren Gagne** has popular musical jam on Fridays at La Tea Café, North Bay.

* **June 19** - Country Music Festival, Napanee Fair Grounds, 170 York St., Napanee.

* **Commercial Tavern** - Maryhill, presents every 2nd Tuesday - Western Swing; every 2nd Wednesday - Bluegrass; Thursday Nights - Open Mic Stage.

* **Aug. 16 - 18** - Sand Road Bluegrass Festival, Sand Road Sugar Camp. Contact Julie or Brian 613-538-2991.

* **Sept. 5 - 8** - Marmora Jamboree. Contact Randy Warren 613-395-0774.

* **Bolton Community Centre and Alton Legion** no longer have jamborees / fiddle nights or afternoon.

* **April 26** - 4th Annual Arthur Francis Delaney Memorial fund raiser in support of Ian Anderson House. Guests - John Gerard

Delaney, Harry Hibbs Tribute, Tim Kennedy and Road House Boys and other special guests. Moose Lodge, 3573 Lakeshore Blvd. W. at 7 pm. Call 416-259-0103.

* **Michael T. Wall** reports from Hollywood, CA that he is have a great time and regards to all. Likely has many copies of the Barn Dance Journal to distribute.

* **April 12** - Bells and Whistle Tour. Johnny Burke and Naomi Bristow first tour in Shelburne. Way to go!!

* **Second Thursday** - of the month, 7 pm, Barrie/Thornton Fiddle Club Jam and Dance, upstairs Thornton Arena. 705-436-3328.

* **Third Sunday** - of the month - A Jamboree at Harriston Legion.

* **The 17th Annual Barn Dance Jamboree / Campout**, Blyth campgrounds/arena, May 22, 23, 24 & 25, 2014; Thurs. 7 pm, Campers' Jam Session, upstairs in the arena; Friday night 7 pm, Bluegrass Show & Open Stage; Sat. 9 am to 3 pm, Musical Flea Market & Silent Auction; 8 pm Barn Dance Show, after show, dancing until midnight; Sun. 10 am to noon, Sunday morning gospel show. Everyone welcome. Host Mary Elliott Huyzen. Please check our website for any further details. Much credit to all who work hard to make this event a continued success and importantly to all the wonderful fans and folks who have come out to various shows over the years. You are truly appreciated.

* **June 20 - 22**: Tottenham Bluegrass Festival, Tottenham Conservation area. A weekend of continued bluegrass, food, lots of booths, and great music all weekend. Children's talent show on Sat. at 1 pm. Contact Peter Deaveau. www.tottenhambluegrass.ca

* **July 19 - 21**: The Queen's Bush Bluegrass Club Campout and Celebration, Wolsley. Contact Dan Campbell 519-371-5037. dcampbell@queensbuch.ca

* **Appearances by Doreen Brown**: Apr. 11, May 2, June 12 - Thornton Fiddle Club; Apr. 15, May 13, June 17 - Rosemont Jamboree; May 22 - 25 - Blyth Campout; June 20 - Tottenham Bluegrass Festival; July 17 - Lindsay Country Jamboree; July 31 - Aug. 3 - Classic Country 23rd Annual Jamboree; Aug. 8-10 - Holstein Bluegrass Celebration.

* **Aug. 27** - Auction Barn Jamboree presents Marty Haggard and Jett Williams with Amberley Beatty. Keeler Centre, Colborne 7 pm. The Auction Jamboree is Aug. 28 - 31 and line up is pending.

* **July 17 - 20**: Lindsay Country Jamboree, 671 Erskiline Ave., Lindsay Agricultural Society Grounds and Facility Unit 201. Info 1-800-954-9998 or 705-741-6097. The building shelters guests, vendors and entertainers; rough camping sites on a first come basis; shuttle service; shop, eat and listen to fantastic country music all at one. Open Mic from Thurs. to Sat. 1 to 5 pm. Line up includes Riki Knox, Bill White; The Hughey Band; Mon-

tana Sky; Stacey Zegers; Chuck Simms; Dave Barber; Marvin James; Diane Chase; Jamie Warren; Wendy Lynn Snider; George Hillier; John Fraser; Mark LaForme; Eddie Eastman; The Garretts; Paul Jones; Gord Youmans.

* **Upcoming Shows**: Contact these numbers for more information - Carden Twp. Community Centre, Carden Fiddlers Jam Session / dance starts 1 pm, 705-325-0009; Dundalk RCL Jam Session/dance, 1 pm, roast beef supper, 519-923-5731; Downeyville Acoustic Jam Session/dance 7 pm, 705-799-0685; Barrie ANAF Club dance/open mic 1 pm, 705-326-8703; Manilla at Community Hall, 16990 Sincoe St., Cty. Rd. 2, Fiddle/jam/dance, 1 pm, 705-357-3453.

* **Auction Barn Jamboree**: Lineup is pending. www.auctionbarnjamboree.ca Camping. The event includes open mic, stage shows each evening Thursday to Saturday, ending 1 a.m. and Sunday at 11 p.m. Gospel Hour on Sunday morning.

* **July 11 - 13** - Napanee Country Jamboree, Napanee Fair Grounds, 170 York St., Napanee.

Thanks so much to all our readers who come out to our jamborees and events to support the Barn Dance and other shows / jamborees, festivals, etc. You are all very much appreciated and have a great summer; we are still having some winter, but things are looking up.

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BARN DANCE CORNER

by Peter Saros

I don't know what I expect of Nashville.

Now, if I were only talking about Nashville as the engine and face of commercial country music, I would have no shortage of hopes, dreams, and expectations. Not to mention a bucket of plain old opinions: Keep it country! Honour the past! The music has to change or it will die!

I understand Nashville as a myth and as an idea.

But what about Nashville as a place, an actual city full of real people leading normal lives? A place where, in fact, country music may not be as important to the average resident as I might like to think.

I am about to find out.

Admittedly, I have been to Nashville only once before. The mid-south city on the Cumberland River has no real claim to me. I know it is smaller than my imagina-

tion and memory may suggest. The city population hovers around the 650,000 person mark. A satellite radio DJ on Sirius XM *Prime Country* was reminding tourists who visit, that the city just isn't that big. Three days is a perfectly adequate amount of time to experience what it has to offer.

My first and only time in Nashville was back in 1996. Garth Brooks was still changing country music forever. Artists like Pam Tillis and Aaron Tippin still mattered enough to make the covers of country music magazines. (It seems odd today that the publishing industry even offered a range of publications covering country music when the genre now depends exclusively on "Country Weekly" for its news and entertainment.)

A saved Citibank Visa credit card receipt provides an interesting window into what once was. The Tower Records where I remember eagerly purchasing all the new Dead Reckoning cassette tapes is gone. Something purchased at a location identified as "Conway Twitty Country;" is no doubt gone. I know Twitty City closed its doors in 1994.

As much as I am interested in seeing how the city has changed and redefined itself, I know I will also gladly indulge nostalgia. There is no reason to think I will not revisit the Ernest Tubb Record Shop, the Ryman Auditorium, and The Loveless Cafe for its hot biscuits and country ham. I certainly have every intention of spending as much time as possible in the landmark Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum which opened back in 2001. I can only imagine the sense of loss that will wash over me as I take in the Hall of Fame Members bronze bas-relief plaques displayed in the Hall of Fame Rotunda. The past years have seen a stream of ships go out.

Even so, with all the change, Nashville has not fully torn up its tracks to the past. Sure there is an NHL hockey franchise playing downtown and the Opry ain't, but I get the sense that Nashville will provide what I need and want of it.

I expect Nashville to still be a city of good ghosts and dreams.

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