



The Barn Dance Opera Journal



Price: \$2.00 (tax incl.)

Official Publication of:
The Barn Dance Historical Society Inc.

A Not For Profit Organization
Barn Dance Website: www.thebardance.ca

Vol. 83 2015

Winter Edition

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Wilf Carter ~ Canada's Yodeling Cowboy

by Lynn Russwurm

Wilf Carter was by far the greatest country artist in Canada. His tenure covered the years from 1933 to 1996. However, he was performing even before his recording debut in 1933. He was conducting trail rides for the CPR in the Rockies, where he would entertain with his guitar at the evening campsites. In fact it was here that he developed his famous three-in-one yodeling technique. And he wrote songs. His recording career started in 1933, when he stopped off in Montreal for an audition with Hugh Joseph at the RCA Victor headquarters. He was on his way to entertain on a cruise ship and being ever the opportunist, he saw an opportunity here. Mr. Joseph had Wilf record two songs as an audition and unbeknownst to Wilf, decided to release them. When Wilf came back from his cruise he found himself the owner of a hit record, "Swiss Moonlight Lullaby", after this there was a steady release of his songs. If you collect 78 PRPM records, you will find more Wilf Carter records than that of anyone else.

About 2 years after his Canadian recording success, Wilf was in New York where he auditioned for both NBC and CBS radio, CBS was his choice and he embarked on a highly successful radio broadcast which ran for a number of years, but here they named him Montana Slim, which stuck with him throughout the years in the U.S.A., while here in Canada he was still Wilf Carter.

Early in 1940 Wilf was involved in a car accident which sidelined him for most of the forties. Then in the early fifties, he started on the comeback trail, even though many of his fans thought he was dead. Then came the cross Canada tours, the first was for Valley Enterprises and

his fans came out in droves, I personally saw him at the Waterloo Arena, in company with The Rhythm Pals. Before and after the show Wilf was backstage telling many of his stories to anybody who would listen and sign autographs till there was no one left. Wilf was a strong believer in satisfying his fans for without them he would be nowhere.

In 1951, Fred Roden took over Wilf's tours when no one else wanted to touch him. Again the fans came out in droves and many young Canadian artists received the benefit of these tours; I saw Clint Curtiss, Myrtle Gifford with back-up by Tex Bloye and his Sagedusters. Eventually Ken Reynolds stepped in as Wilf's manager with annual cross Canada tours.

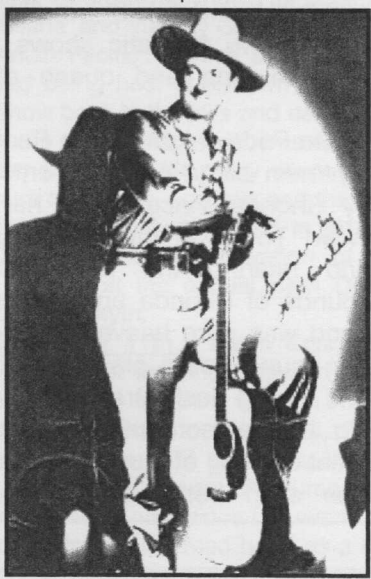
In 1954, Red Garret and his band provided back-up for Wilf, and when they played the Elmira Arena, my wife and I approached Red for a picture with him. Noting our western dress, he asked if I play guitar, and then asked if I would take his place at the dance to follow as he was feeling under the weather and felt he couldn't do the dance. Of course, I would

love to, I would be playing with Ward Allen and steel guitar player Howard White from Nashville, who later became a top producer in Nashville. What a thrill that was! Then when they played the Waterloo Arena about a month later, Red invited us up on stage to do several numbers, what a thrill that was!!

What many people don't realize is the influence Wilf Carter had on the country music scene. Many youngsters started out with Wilf as their idol and in Australia almost every artist to follow cited Wilf Carter as their major influence and there was much yodeling that came out of Australia. At one point, Ken Reynolds arranged a tour of Australia which was aborted after one or two concerts, as Wilf became too ill to perform.



Dance after The Wilf Carter Show, 1954 at Elmira Arena. L to R - Ward Allen, Lynn Russwurm, Bev Hopkins and Ken Reynolds.



WILF CARTER

Throughout the sixties and onward, Wilf guested on many TV shows such as Tommy Hunter show, did a TV Special for the CBC, performed at the CNE, The Calgary Stampede, did tours with Nashville

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The Editor Speaks

by Grant Heywood



2015 has arrived. My, how time flies. Most of the weather forecasts I heard, said we were in for a milder winter than last year. They could likely get a job as a politician if they kept making forecasts like that. Just like most folks say about summer, I can take the heat but not the humidity. Well I can take the snow.....about 3 inches, but not the minus 25 temps. Brrrrr.

This past fall, my wife and I made our annual fall trek to Kentucky. We had a little more time on our hands as we rolled into Renfro Valley this time around. The fall is a beautiful time of year to take in the change in colour of the leaves as we meandered through the Appalachian/Cumberland Mountains. This is the bluegrass state and it made our mini-holiday that much sweeter knowing we were going to take in two fantastic shows by the veritable king and queen of bluegrass.

On Friday night on the Renfro Valley main stage we were entertained by Rhonda Vincent and her band. Wow! To be in the bluegrass state and hearing the pure bluegrass sounds of Rhonda and her fantastic band was pure heaven. I do believe her young dobro player Brent Burke is a young Josh Graves in the making. He was something else. It was a great evening of bluegrass music and was even better after the concert

when we were leaving under the night skies in the Kentucky hills with the music still ringing in our ears. It doesn't get much better than this.

We had an early breakfast on Saturday morning and decided to take a drive to Mt. Vernon near Renfro Valley. We doubled back over I-75 and then headed off on some backroads in the mountain area of Daniel Boone National Forest with a mist rising in the early morning hours. Aside from the beautiful mountain terrain it was much like the back hills of Virginia in the movie 'Lawless'. One of the roads was barely wide enough for two cars let alone one. The beautiful fall colours, back wood cabins, meandering streams and panoramic mountain vistas were a sight to behold. We got back to our hotel just in time for a 'real' home-cooked Kentucky fried chicken dinner. (not KFC)

On Saturday night we went back to Renfro Valley to witness the one and only Ricky Skaggs and his band. We've seen Ricky a number of times but it was extra special to see and hear him in his own Bluegrass State. Ricky was pitching a new autobiography book and it was nice to see him let his band members solo and sing a number of songs. His young bass player is from Texas and performed and sang a jazzier piece of music that mesmerized the audience. It wasn't bluegrass, but you don't have to be a purist to enjoy good music. I talked for a minute or two with Ricky after the show, had him sign a cd and then we drifted off to our vehicle taking in the fresh Kentucky night air.

The next day we headed home feeling completely satisfied with our trip to the land of bluegrass. I'm not sure what's in store for our next fall trip to Kentucky but I just noticed that one of my favourite country bands

The Barn Dance Historical Society and Entertainment

Museum

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(or leave a message)

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and Lynn Russwurm.

'Restless Heart' will be performing at the Daniel Boone Festival not far from Renfro Valley. Hmmmm, I think I've got half the trip planned already. If you're making plans for this year, just check our current Barn Dance Schedule. Mark it on your calendar. It would be great to see you at the next Barn Dance show. Hope to see you there.

Comments? Please contact:
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or send a message on facebook.

2015 COMING EVENTS

Date	Event Name	Place
Mon., April 6	Barn Dance Society Annual General Meeting	Barn Dance Museum, Wingham
Sun., April 26	Southwold Library Fundraiser - 2:00 p.m.	Southwold Keystone Complex, Shedden
Sun., May 3	Barn Dance Show - 2:00 p.m.	Purple Hill Country Hall, Thorndale
May 22 to 24	Barn Dance Campout Weekend	Blyth Campgrounds & Arena, Blyth
Tues., July 14	Barn Dance Show - 7:30 p.m.	Bach Festival, Exeter

Continued from Page 1

stars where he would always close the shows he played in Canada. He remained with RCA except for a short period with Decca and two albums for Starday in the U.S.A.

Always the trouper, Wilf continued with his tours even though his eyesight and his hearing were getting very bad, but in his later years he would do a farewell tour every year; and even though his voice was not what it once was, I remember standing in the wings at one of his farewell concerts and overhearing two old fellows saying "That Wilf Carter sings as good as ever". His fans were true to the end.

Wilf maintained a home in Arizona where he passed away in 1996. His summers were spent in Canada, near Calgary. He religiously answered his fan mail personally and thereby kept his fans. Truly he was the greatest here in Canada, he exemplified what a true country star



A picture from the 1990's of the late Howard "Smoky" Weber (Barn Dance Pioneer inductee), and daughter Sue Weber, performing at Paul Weber's Commercial Tavern in Maryhill. The very best in country music entertainment every Thursday, Friday and Saturday at the Commercial in Maryhill.



Barn Dance celebrity star, Martha Heywood, and grand daughter, Kianna Heywood, smiling as they enjoy their dessert at the Annual Barn Dance Historical Society Christmas Banquet at the White Carnation in Holmesville.

IN MEMORIAM



NOTABLE COUNTRY ARTISTS WE LOST IN 2014

January 3rd – **Phil Everly**, 74, one-half of The Everly Brothers and was born in Chicago, Illinois. Most often during the early part of the year we tend to forget some of those who have passed on. Phil Everly may have been overlooked by some, but he and his brother made a huge impact on pop and country music. Their harmonies and string of hits made them legends in their own time. The Everly Brothers have been inducted into both the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame as well as the Country Music Hall of Fame.

April 11th – **Jesse Winchester**, 69, Canadian country-folk singer-songwriter who left the U.S.A. to avoid the Vietnam war draft and moved to Montreal Canada. Known for songs such as 'The Brand New

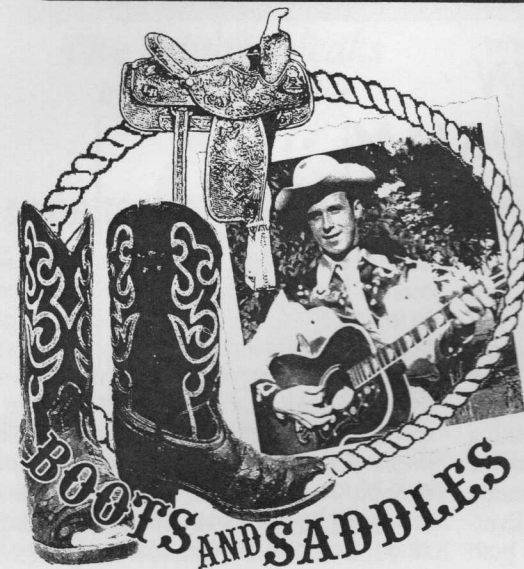
Tennessee Waltz', and 'Third Rate Romance', he also released several albums in the 1970's. Jesse moved back to Virginia in 2000 under the amnesty program and received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the American Society of Authors & Composers in 2007. He left an indelible imprint on the Canadian/American music scene.

April 19th – **Kevin Sharp**, 43, country singer from the 1990's, best known for his song 'Nobody Knows'. Kevin was a young 'up and coming' country artist who battled cancer for a long time. He will be remembered for his generosity towards children who were also battling cancer.

June 21st – **Jimmy C. Newman**, 86, country singer/songwriter best known for his Cajun style of music. His middle initial 'C' stood for Cajun. Born in Louisiana, Jimmy became a fixture on the Grand Ole Opry and was inducted into the Country Music Association's International Hall of Fame in 2000.

September 17th – **George Hamilton IV**, 77, known as the country gentleman, and Grand Ole Opry star. Born in North Carolina, George was known for such hits as 'Abilene' and the Ray Griff penned tune 'Canadian Pacific', as well as others. He enjoyed being host of his own Canadian T.V. show back in the 60's and earned the nickname 'International Ambassador of Country Music' for his many country music tours of Europe, Australia and the Middle East. He recently appeared in 2012, at the 75th anniversary celebration of the Barn Dance, at the annual Barn Dance Jamboree in Blyth.

December 11th – **Dawn Sears**, 53, backing vocalist for Vince Gill and member of 'The Time Jumpers' western swing / country band. Born in Minnesota, Sears had recorded her first album for Warner Bros. in 1990 but she got discouraged after only 2 minor hits. Vince Gill eventually asked her to join his road band as a harmony vocalist. She can be heard on recorded tracks by Vince Gill and Tracy Byrd. She will always be remembered as a superb vocalist and her haunting rendition of 'Sweet Memories' with the Time Jumpers.



by Lynn Russwurm

At this writing, winter has moved in with a vengeance. After an almost snowless December, we're getting some of that white stuff with very cold temps. Of course this is January and I'd rather have it now than in April when we're looking forward to the warm summer.

Anyway, in this weather we look to the indoors for our amusement. I'm going to run over some of the entertainment places and see where it's all at. First my favourite place is The Top End Restaurant & Tavern in Neustadt. With new owners at the helm, the entertainment has been up-scaled. The Two Plus Who (myself and Bob Trembley), along with a different singer are in for the second Saturday of every month, January and February. We're also in for the fourth Saturday, hours are from 5:00 to 9:00. This Saturday,

we have Bruce Robertson with us, on Jan. 24 we have Roma with us again. Other bands that play there include Harry Busby, Randy Morrison (who was not able to make it on Jan. 3) and they're getting other top-notch groups in. On Feb. 14, Doug Dietrich joins us; Feb. 28, it's Al Widmeyer and Pat LaRue; March 14 will bring in Lance Russwurm and Mike Weber, who I consider the best steel guitarist around.

If you're in the vicinity of Guelph, good country entertainment can be found most Sat. afternoons at the Red Chevron on Elizabeth Street. Ephraim Frey

and Olde-Tyme Country are there once a month, The Two Plus Who will be in on March 28 with Lance Russwurm, Mike Weber and probably Al Widmeyer, remember hours are 2 to 6 on a Saturday afternoon.

The Army, Navy & Air Force Club on Gage Street in Kitchener has Ephraim Frey & Olde-Tyme Country at least once a month, with other groups, some country and some not, you'll have to check who's there.

In Stratford, we have the Stratford Legion running a dance every Saturday night with Gerald Davidson, Doug Dietrich and Sunrise, U-Turn and other country bands filling the Saturday nights with good dance music.

If you're into bluegrass, you might like to come to the Galt Legion for a jam session every Tuesday night, if you want to join in, bring your axe or

just come to listen. Also, later in the winter there will be several bluegrass concerts with U.S. bands coming in on tour, I don't have dates.

Of course, the main country music venue is the Commercial Tavern in Maryhill. Owned by Paul Weber, there is a regular slate of entertainment with Paul providing most of the music in between visiting bands, such as Ridin' High, Southbound, U-Turn, etc. on every Friday and Saturday night. Every Thursday night is open mike with Paul, his sister Sue and George Lonsbury providing back-up for any enterprising entertainer who wants to get up and do their stuff, you'll find me there most Thursday nights. Every second Tuesday night is the Western Swing Authority and if you like western swing, as played by great musicians, this is where you want to be. Every other Wednesday night is bluegrass night with the Commercial Blue Grass Band, which is comprised of the best pickers from the Galt jams, including Al Widmeyer, Dickie Dugal, Glenn George, Ken Grooms and Dan Howlett.

And don't forget the Jamborees that take place on Sunday afternoon in many different locations such as Legions, and other service club halls. These are usually very enjoyable if you want to dance or just listen.

It won't be long when we'll be able to look to the outdoors for good country music, but for now the venues listed will provide good entertainment, if you're looking for country music.



Harry Busby, Lynn Russwurm and Lance Russwurm at The Top End Restaurant & Tavern in Neustadt.

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Business Card Size -

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Full Page (inside) -

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*Little Jimmy Dickens 'Tater'**December 19, 1920 – January 2, 2015***A Class Act Who Was 'Old School Opry'**

When Little Jimmy Dickens came on to the Opry stage in Nashville, he commanded a presence like no one else. With his short stature, big guitar, and rhinestone cowboy suit, you knew what to expect from an entertainer who practically owned the stage. Jimmy sang songs to make you laugh and think about the simple life. Nothing fancy, just a big smile from a small framed man who enjoyed singing and performing not only on the Opry but all over the world.

Jimmy came from Bolt, West Virginia, pursuing his musical career in the 1930's after quitting school. He travelled and performed across the country and on radio under the name 'Jimmy The Kid'. Around 1948 he signed a record deal with Columbia Records and soon after joined the Grand Ole Opry under the name 'Little Jimmy Dickens'. Jimmy wrote many novelty songs including 'Country Boy', 'I'm Little But I'm Loud', and 'Take An Old Old Tater (And Wait)'. The last song inspired Hank Williams to nickname him 'Tater' and Hank asked Jimmy to write him a hit song. Hank penned 'Hey Good Lookin'' in only 20 minutes while on a plane with Dickens, Minnie Pearl and her husband. Just a week later Hank recorded the song himself, and joked when he told little Jimmy, "That song's too good for you".

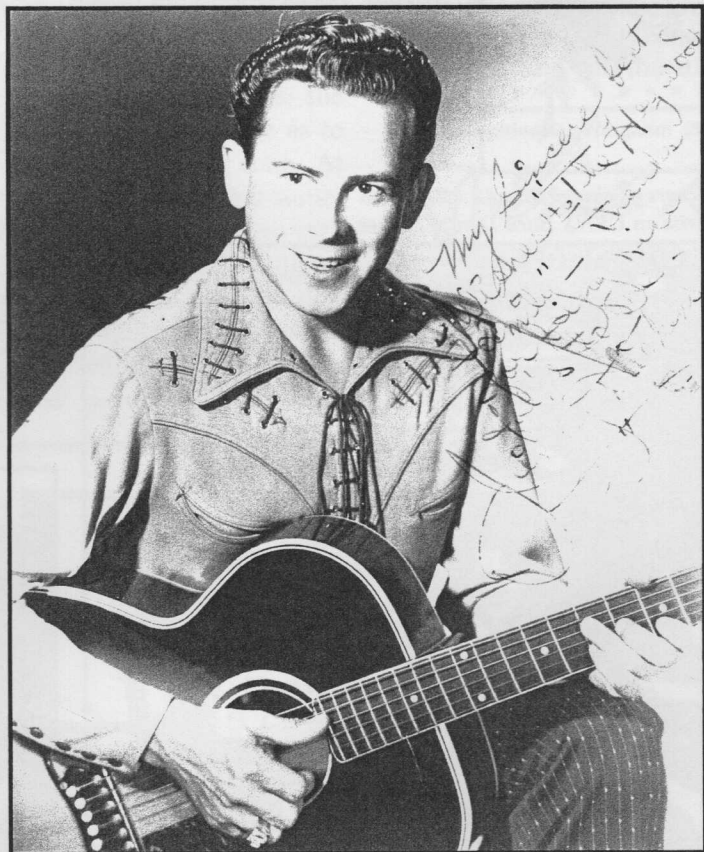
In 1950 Jimmy formed the group 'The Country Boys', and while touring with the Grand Ole Opry Show, Jimmy discovered Marty Robbins at a Phoenix Arizona television station. In 1962 Dickens had his first top ten hit with 'The Vio-

let and the Rose'. His first number one hit came in 1965 with 'May the Bird Of Paradise Fly Up Your Nose'. Jimmy went from Columbia to the Decca label and then United Artists around 1971, the same year he married his wife Mona. In 1975 he was inducted into the Country Music Hall Of Fame. Later in his career, Jimmy appeared in several country music videos with Brad Paisley and others.

With the death of Hank Locklin in 2009, Dickens became the oldest living member of the Grand Ole Opry at age 90. Jimmy was a regular on the Opry stage always joking that he's 'Willie Nelson after taxes'. I remember meeting Little Jimmy Dickens backstage in the early 60's when he performed a country show with my dad, Earl Heywood, in Lucan, Ontario. I was about 12 or 13 years old then and I remember Little Jimmy jokingly saying

something like, 'I don't need any competition son', as I was just about the same height as him. He was a wonderful man, and I got to see him years later at the Ryman in Nashville in the late 90's.

On Dec. 25, 2014, Little Jimmy suffered a stroke, just days after his last appearance on the Opry to mark his birthday. He died of cardiac arrest on Jan. 2, 2015, at age 94. He is survived by his wife Mona and two daughters Pamela, and Lisa. With the loss of 'Tater' we'll be missing a part of country music that was genuine and not phony. Little Jimmy Dickens was the last of a dying breed of country artists who knew it was okay to have fun, make jokes and mistakes, while maintaining his entertaining professionalism. Country music has most certainly lost a treasure because they just don't make them like 'Tater' anymore.



An autographed picture from Little Jimmy Dickens to the Heywood Family. It reads: My Sincere best wishes to The Heywood Family. Thanks for being nice folks to me. Jimmy Dickens

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 ~ (519) 530-8000*

E-mail: webmaster@thebardance.ca

Country Music Memories



1950'S PICTURE OF THE Canadian Cowboys with Laura and Lynn Russwurm.



1954 - The Howard Sisters from Sarnia, Ontario, make their appearance on the CKNX Barn Dance.



Barn Dance M.C Johnny Brent introduces well-known fiddler, Clare Adlam at a Fiddler's Jamboree at the Wingham Legion.



Circa 1949 - 1950. Cowboy singer, Earl Heywood, daughter Patsy Ann and cowboy star Gene Autry.



A 1958 - 1959 cowboy promotion picture of Grant Heywood, of the Heywood Family.



A 1944 picture of the Mercy Brothers. Ray and Larry Mercy certainly got started at an early age. Ray's guitar is too small and Larry's is too big.



Circa 1951. Some of the Barn Dance radio performers behind CKNX Radio station in Wingham. Lloyd Bank, Pauline Swanson, Maurice Bolyer, Bill Simms, Jack Kingston, Les Dowell and Earl Heywood.

An early picture of singer Brenda Allen, who was a favourite on CKNX Barn Dance Shows.

COUNTRY CALENDAR



by Doreen Brown

(Toronto and surrounding area)

* **Purple Hill Opry Shows** - first Sunday of the month 2:00 pm. 519-461-0538.

www.purplehillcountryhall.com

* **Sun., April 26** - Country Music Southwold Library fundraiser, Southwold Keystone Complex, Shedden.

* **Not too soon to mark your calendars** - 18th Annual Jamboree and Campout Weekend, May 21 to 24, Blyth Campgrounds and Arena Complex, Blyth. www.thebardance.ca

* **February 6** - The Good Family, Hamilton Public Library, 7:30, hosted by The Good Family.

* **Second Sunday of the Month** - Don Celsie's Jamboree, Orillia Army and Navy.

* **Jammin' in Beeton** - This event is open to musicians / music lovers. The second and fourth Friday of the month, 7:30 pm

* **Appearances by Doug Dietrich** - March 28, Listowel Agricultural Hall, MCO, 8:30 to 12:30; April 25, St. Mary's Legion Annual BBQ.

* **Dundalk Jamboree** - January to April, Bond Head, fourth Tuesday; Downeyville, fourth Saturday. January to June, Manillia, fourth Sunday, except July and August.

* **Upcoming** - Pickin in the park, July 23 - 26, Shelburne. http://pickinthepark.webs.com Also a Fiddle Weekend in August; there will be a Barn Dance jam on the Wednesday night before on the ice surface at the arena.

* **Appearances by Doreen Brown:** Blyth Campout Weekend, May 23 - 25; Rosemont, March 17; Thornton,

Jan. 9 and Feb. 12; Bond Head, March 24.

* **July 24 - 25** - Ontario Open Fiddle and Step Dance Contest, Bobcaygeon.

* **Every Thursday Night** - at Parkview Seniors Centre, Old time seniors dance starts 1:30 p.m. Live Band. 189 Blake St., Barrie. 705-737-0755.

* **For upcoming appearance** - of Stay Tuned. Contact richardwigfield@sympatico.ca 519-967-1743

* **Fiddles and Squares** - Square Dance Parties. Ralph and Sandy Price, 705-835-3159
ralph.sandyprice@sympatico.ca

* **Michael T. Wall** - Well known Michael T. Wall has just recently returned from a wonderful trip to Jerusalem, and plans returning to Australia early in the New Year. Way to go, Michael. Please say "HI" to all DJs from Canadian friends. We all appreciate your international support.

* **NOTE:** I recall when Loretta Lynn would come out on stage, she would mention to her audience as to her feelings at a particular time. At this time, I am mentioning that someone very close to me has been very ill since May, through much support it has helped. This being my 18th year of Country Calendar, it's been a pleasure, and will try to have more info for the next publication. To

those who attend and support The Barn Dance Historical Society, a very special thank you and wishing all a wonderful, happy and healthy 2015.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Doreen Brown is also an established country music performer. Check out her appearances as well.

BARN DANCE SOUVENIRS

Please go to

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for a full list of

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DON'T FORGET**Mon., April 6, 2015**

**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!!

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BARN DANCE CORNER

by Peter Saros

Listen to all the artist tributes honouring the late Little Jimmy Dickens and three things immediately become clear: Dickens was little, loud, and loved.

And the greatest of his attributes was love. Whether it was Vince Gill asking for a show of hands at his funeral service for everyone who thought they thought they were Dickens' best friend, Darius Rucker sharing the highlight of his year was being greeted by Little Jimmy backstage at the Opry, or Keith Urban posthumously thanking Dickens for "bringing your beautiful light into the world, Dickens had a special ability to charm and endear himself to everyone he met.

I know I fell under his spell when he made an unexpected Opry appearance when I was in Nashville this past May. I thought the diminutive dynamo was speaking directly to me as he told his impeccably paced jokes, and I was seated up high, in, and in back of the centre balcony. It is fair to say Dickens had become more famous for his

person and charisma than his music.

It was a crying shame, because Dickens' music mattered. "May the Bird of Paradise Fly Up Your Nose" aside, Little Jimmy was no novelty act. He was a celebrated balladeer, influenced and inspired by Roy Acuff who was responsible for bringing Dickens to the Grand Ole Opry sixty seven years ago in 1948. His backing band the Country Boys had a signature sound powered by twin electric guitars. Robert 'Jabbo' Arrington and Grady Martin were the founding pickers. Their sparkling and snappy playing was a perfect complement to the rhinestoned western Nudie suits Dickens wore whenever he performed. He is credited with being one of the first Opry artists to wear the outfits made by the Hollywood tailor which would become synonymous with country music fashion and stardom.

What should be of particular interest to our readers is that Dickens was a product of the barn dance show circuit. Dickens played the many regional barn dance shows that seemed to be everywhere in the the 1940's, playing exclusively ballads and gospel material. Cincinnati WLW Midwestern Hayride was his springboard to the Opry stage. In

between, he played everywhere from Topeka, Kansas' WLBW Kansas Roundup to the barn dance show in Saginaw, Michigan.

Dickens found success on all those shows because he was a classic, confidant, and complete entertainer. He was storyteller, comedian, and musician. He knew how to read an audience. It was rumoured he could do it with just two jokes. And he always stuck to his country guns. His commitment to tradition and his gentlemanly demeanour made him the perfect country music ambassador for a generation of rising stars. Dickens made the past accessible, interesting, and important.

I came to the Dickens catalogue via Ricky Van Shelton's covers of "I Got A Hole In My Bucket" and "Life Turned Her That Way" in the late eighties. I can only hope young country music fans listening to Brad Paisley albums today will hear the Kung Pao Buckaroos and wonder just who the heck was Little Jimmy Dickens.

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