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# The Barn Dance Opera Journal



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The Barn Dance Historical Society Inc.



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**Vol. 89 2016**

**Summer Edition**

**1**

*Barn Dance Band Profile Series*

## Bill Norris, Fiddle Player. Like Father ... Like Son.

by Grant Heywood

If you're going to play country music, you've got to have a fiddle in the band, so the song says. Barn Dance fiddle player, Bill Norris got his start at 13 playing fiddle around the Hessall area with his award winning fiddling dad's band 'Hank Norris & the Ranch Boys', along with his brother on drums and other brother on banjo. And just like his dad, Bill learned to play fiddle, mandolin and guitar with only a few lessons, and by paying close attention, listening to old time country music. Bill's ambition was to become a teacher but country music soon became a big influence in his life. Now retired from his days of sales and marketing in an automotive firm, Bill's musical life has become more fun without having to do the daily grind.

Bill and his wife Loxcy have been married for 52 years, reside in Woodstock, Ont. and have 3 children. Over the years Bill has performed with his dad's family band, Clarence Petrie, Jeff Barry's Rhythm Ranch Boys for 35 years, plus his own band, Country Justice. He currently plays with Fred Lewis & Ridin' High band and has been in the Barn Dance Band since 2008. One of Bill's favourite influential fiddle players was the late, great, champion fiddler, Al Cherny, of Country Hoedown Fame. Al was also the resident fiddle player for the Barn Dance back in the 50's/60's.

O'Connor is considered by Bill as one of the greatest fiddlers of our time. Although Bill has never met Mark, he has met Gene Watson and his steel player Corry Owens, and bluegrass artist Rhonda Vincent. He attributes meeting his favourite singer, Faron Young, backstage at Cobo Hall in Detroit as one of the highlights of his life. Bill has also had the opportunity to work with a lot of local professional musicians over the years, including, award winning steel player, Doug Johnson, legends such as Earl & Martha Heywood, George Hamilton IV, and champion fiddlers Linsey Beckett, and Don Reed.

I asked Bill about the best and worst gigs he's ever performed at. Bill says, "Playing at the Boot Hill Jamboree with Naomi Bristow was a career highlight for sure". "The worst job I played was when Clarence Petrie asked me to play stand-up bass and

square dance tunes on fiddle ... it wasn't fun". Bill has played on various recordings including an album with Jeff Barry and a CD with popular country group Southbound.

As far as personality goes, Bill is a lot of fun and has a no nonsense attitude onstage, even when the band is cracking jokes. "It's the nervous excitement and challenge as well as working with the guys in the band that make the Barn Dance shows so motivating and professional", says Bill. There's no doubt that Bill works hard at playing the fiddle and I've heard him at his best when playing double fiddles in harmony with Linsey Beckett on the Barn Dance stage. As well, Bill loves the standards and still considers St. Anne's Reel as one of his favourite fiddle tunes to perform. Bill says, "I never get tired of playing any of the good old fiddle tunes".

*Continued on Page 3*

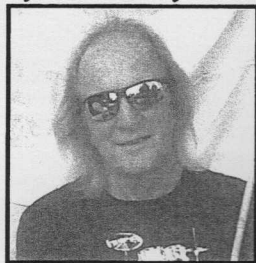


*Barn Dance fiddler, Bill Norris, with his wife Loxcy and family, backstage at the Blyth Barn Dance, after receiving his Barn Dance Pioneer Award.*

Nashville fiddle player, Mark

## The Editor Speaks

by Grant Heywood



We hardly get a spring season anymore. Seems like I was just shoveling snow and all of a sudden summer arrived. Well I don't like the cold so I'll take whatever nice weather Mother Nature provides. Now I've got all the outside work to do and I'm still wrapping up our kitchen renovation at the same time. Never a dull moment.

Our 19<sup>th</sup> annual Blyth Campout Jamboree has come and gone. The weather was good (a bit hot), and everyone seemed to enjoy the entertaining weekend. We still have a few shows left for 2016, so check our Barn Dance Schedule. We are already working on special Barn Dance presentation for next year's 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Blyth Campout Jamboree. You'll definitely not want to miss this one.

I'm sad to say the list of many of country artists who've died continues to grow. Recently with the passing of legendary Merle Haggard who had 40 number one hits. Merle was a country music icon to say the least, and it is always a pleasure when the Barn Dance Band performs a medley of Haggard tunes. The 'Southern Gentleman', Sonny James, best known for his song 'Young Love' also passed away. Musician, Red Simpson who pioneered the Bakersfield Sound, and Grammy producer/musician, Chips Moman, who produced records for Willie, Waylon, Aretha Franklin and Elvis, just recently joined the heavenly honour roll as well.

One of my heroes also passed away recently, the 'King of the Texas Troubadours', Guy Clark. I remember being in

Nashville back in the late 90's. I was in Nashville for a week and I was doing song-writing sessions at Polygram Records with Dickey Lee, (who wrote 'She Thinks I Still Care' for George Jones). I was also had sessions with Rich Fagan, who co-wrote 'Grundy County Auction' for John Michael Montgomery. Usually, we'd do song writing sessions by day and then I would most often have my evenings free. Printers Alley still had a few country clubs operating then and I spent a lot of evenings downstairs at 'Barbara's', where there was always 'real' country music onstage.

Barbara's was a great country honky tonk to hang out at and I relished in the stellar musicianship of the band. The musicians would quite often be different every night and were usually made up of many of the road bands who backed up all the Nashville stars like, John Michael Montgomery, Alan Jackson, Martina McBride and so on. Although the band was always 'hot', it was sad there weren't more people at the club. I guess this is when Nashville was just about to go through a transition ... and not for the better.

It was a Thursday night when I decided to make the trek to Printers Alley and pull up a table and chair at Barbara's. Listening to the band play was a delight and some of the special guests were awesome. I had a couple of beers and the band finished their first set, when in walks singer/songwriter, Guy Clark. When he took the stage and started to sing, it was heaven. Here's a guy that wrote songs for Alan Jackson, Jimmy Buffet, Jerry Jeff Walker and so many more. He wrote 'Heartbroke' for Ricky Skaggs, 'Desperados Waiting For A Train' for the Highwaymen, and he was often known as the 5<sup>th</sup> Highwayman, along with Willie, Johnny, Kristofferson, and Waylon. Rodney Crowell co-wrote 'She's Crazy For Leaving' with Guy Clark. It was a special treat to see and hear Guy singing onstage at Barbara's club that night.

## The Barn Dance Historical Society and Entertainment Museum

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(or leave a message)

**BARN DANCE WEBSITE:**

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Earl Heywood

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Since the place was nearly empty it was like my own personal concert with Guy Clark onstage. He sang old songs, new songs and was totally relaxed as if he just dropped in to jam with the band. No doubt being at the right place, at the right time, really paid off that night for me. I'll never forget it. And like so many others I am sad to see them go like the passing of an era.

Don't forget, if you plan things right, you can be at the right place at the right time too, if you check our Barn Dance Schedule for upcoming shows. Hope to see you at the next Barn Dance.

Comments? Please contact:

Grant Heywood

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E-mail: [heywoods@xplornet.ca](mailto:heywoods@xplornet.ca)

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## 2016 COMING EVENTS

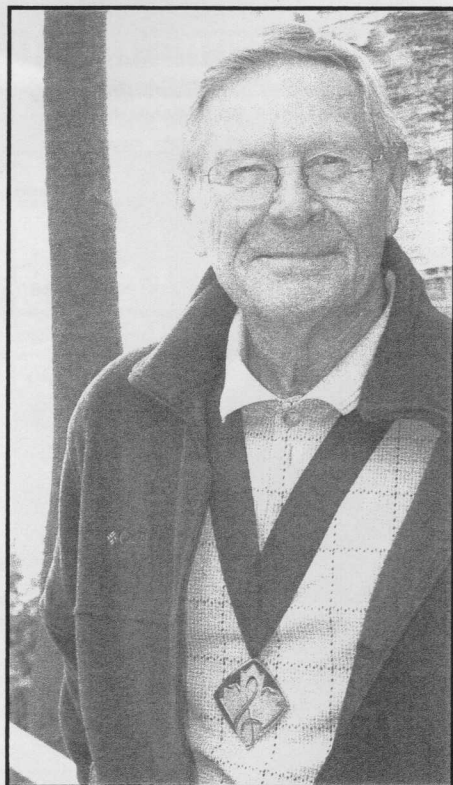
Date	Event Name	Place
Sun., Sept. 25	Barn Dance Show - 2:30 p.m.	Southwold Community Complex, Shedden
Sun., Nov. 20	Barn Dance Christmas Show - 2:30 p.m.	Brigden Fairgrounds Exhibition Hall, Brigden

Continued from Page 1

On Saturday, May 28<sup>th</sup> at the 19<sup>th</sup> annual Blyth Barn Dance Campout Jamboree, Bill Norris received the Barn Dance Pioneer Award. It was a total surprise to Bill as his wife and family were all there to celebrate the occasion. It was indeed an honour and the Barn Dance Band looks forward to many more performances ahead as Bill rosin's up his bow for another show.



*Doing what he does best on the fiddle. Bill Norris on the Commercial Tavern stage in Maryhill.*



*Ed Preston, so proud of his CCMA Medal - wearing it proudly.*

## J. Edward Preston

by Lynn Russwurm

Sounds kind of dignified, yet J. Edward Preston is as down to earth as any man could be. Ed Preston contributed to his chosen professional career as much as anyone could have. He knew it would be demanding but Ed was approachable, and personable regardless of the challenges.

I first met Eddie in 1956 when he vacated his job as librarian at CHML in Hamilton and took on the job as drummer in Jack Kingston's Mainstreeters. The band included some of the best musicians around, with Wally Traugott, Maurice Bolyer and Lloyd Bank. With the addition of Ed Preston the band really hit its stride and were unmatched by anyone. Whoever heard of a drummer in a country band, especially in those days, unless you were Bob Wills or Spade Cooley.

Ed fit right in with his innovative ways and soon set his sights to work as a top promoter and manager as this department was wide open without much competition. He took on Peggy Jo Stewart from Buffalo and placed her with the Lawrence Welk show for an appearance. Peggy Jo was a hot entertainer at the time and pre-dated Leeann Rimes and Suzy Boguss with her recording of 'Cowboy's Sweetheart'. It was a rare recording on the Spartan label here in Canada, and never released in the USA. The Main Street Jamboree was eventually shelved along with the dreams of a truly Canadian style Grand Ole Opry, and the end of an era.

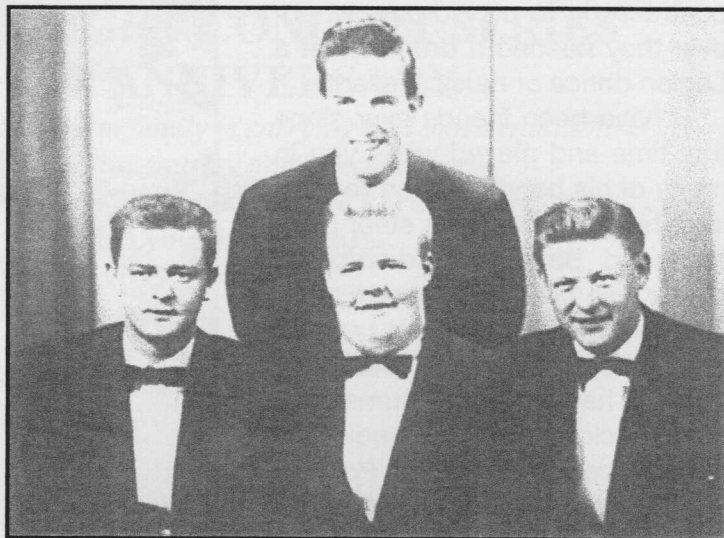
In the beginning, Ed was with a non-country band 'The Count Four', but soon his country leanings began to further his career prospective. RCA became a major force in Canada with their country oriented hits. Through a series of promotions, Ed soon became Canadian V.P. with RCA and he continued to build the label. An enviable position, for a

home country boy with big ideas

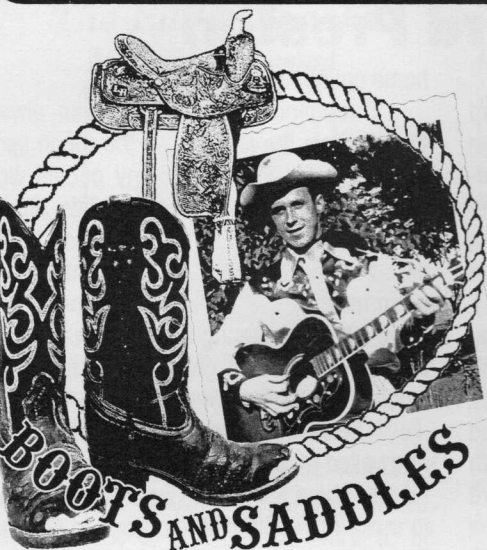
Throughout the years he was always there to help the artists over the rough spots on their tours. I'm sure many people wondered who this man was with his affable, pleasant ways, as if nothing seemed to faze him. I would meet Ed backstage at an Opry performance where Hank Snow or Charley Pride were appearing and there was Ed. He always had time to greet an old friend and catch up on things.

The path always lay ahead and Ed never dwelled much on the past but was always excited about the future. Ed undoubtedly had to make many difficult decisions in his position while raising a young family. He opted to stay in Canada rather than taking the fast lane south of the border, which in the long run was a wise move. From RCA he was handed the assignment of re-vitalizing the career of Roger Whittaker, along with his holdings until the time seemed right to rest on his laurels and finally take it easy.

The music business has been good for J. Ed Preston, and today he's as reachable as ever with his help and insight. Hopefully, it can be shared with the younger generation or performer that appreciates the experience that's available to them. I believe that music industry builders like J. Ed Preston were the backbone of our country music, and still have a lot to offer. Ed was inducted into the Canadian Country Music Hall of Fame in 2003 and has reason to be proud of an illustrious career.



*Ed Preston, seated right, with other members of his first vocal group, The Count Four, in 1951. Standing, John McDonald, and seated from left, Roy Beuley and Johnny Bell.*



by Grant Heywood

Lynn Russwurm has been in the music business almost his entire life. His dedication to traditional country music knows no bounds. I have had the pleasure of knowing Lynn since I was a teenager and took the opportunity in my teens to play with Lynn, his wife Laura and their son Lance, in their band 'The Hummingbirds'. It was the sixties, and I had only been playing drums for a short time while with my own rock band, and my mom and dad. Lynn and my dad (Earl Heywood) were musical friends and even wrote some songs together. Lynn would also contract me to play drums whenever they needed a drummer at a region dance or musical event.

I have been friends ever since that time and played with Lynn in many of his bands and on recordings he produced with steel player, Lloyd Bank, accordion/piano player, Bill Mankiss, country singer Dusty King, fiddler Mel Lavigne and others. Over the past few years I have played drums and sung backup on Lynn's solo CD and Lance's recent 'Self Portrait' CD. I guess you could say that our friendship has lasted many decades and it has been a treat to make music with Lynn and Lance for so many years.

Most recently, Lynn has been having health issues and has been in and out of the hospital. I know how much Lynn loves to stage the 'Music in the Park' on Sundays in Gore Park in Elmira and he hinted to me that he was looking forward to recording another CD of some new songs that he was working on. His health deteriorated in the last while and although Lynn's strong will to make a comeback was fading he seemed to fight the odds and rallied around, al-

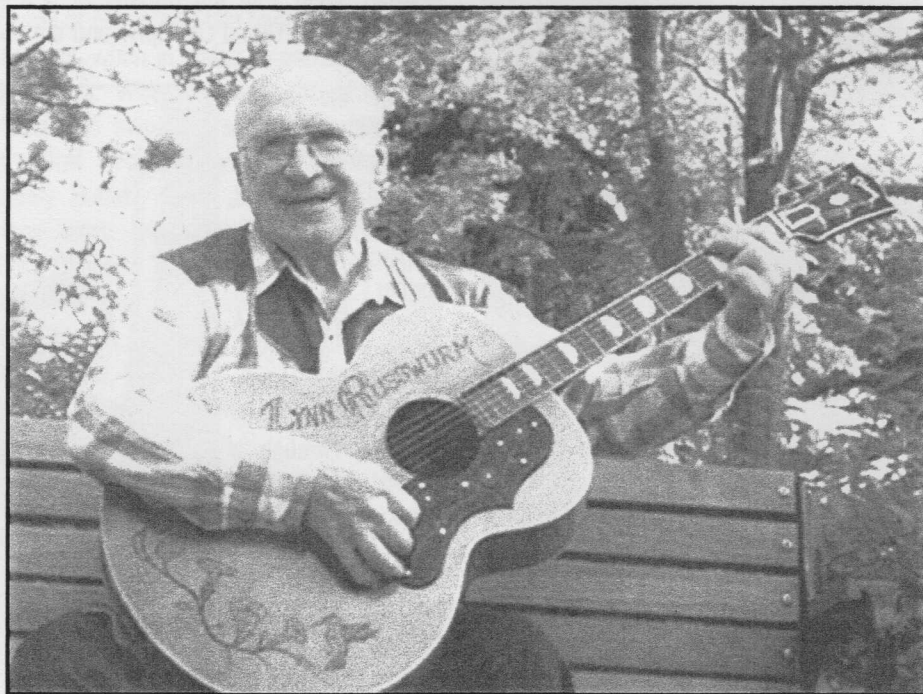
though he is not out of the woods yet. All I can say is that he could make a recovery and only time will tell.

Lynn is truly a traditional country music historian. This column is a small testament to his vast knowledge of country music history. There are not very many songwriter/singers from the 'old school' of country music around anymore and losing Lynn would be a tragic loss in more ways than one. Lynn is a gifted songwriter and talented man and I truly hope he can make

it through this recent battle with his health. Lynn's legacy is large and the talents of Lynn's family are steeped in art and music. He is one lucky man for sure. I do hope and pray that Lynn will once again be making music and back writing his Boots & Saddles column right here in the Barn Dance Opera Journal. Chin up old friend. You've got a lot of folks who would like to see you continue your musical journey. I, for one, am looking forward to working with you and keeping the spirit of traditional country music alive.



Lynn, Laura and Lance Russwurm  
(early picture of The Hummingbirds)  
circa late 1950's.



Lynn Russwurm

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The Barn Dance Historical Society Board members at the recent General Meeting in April, at the Barn Dance Museum in Wingham. Front row - L to R - Richard Holm, Betty Beer, Gord Baxter, Ron Coulthard, Ruth Baxter. Back row - L to R - Doreen Armbruster, Doug Dietrich, Dave Wall, Ron Shaw, Bill Simmermaker, Carol Shaw, Ted Weishar, Grant Heywood, Irene Bettinger. Absent: Lynn Russwurm.



Gerald Davidson and Ashley Giles of the Country Versatiles at the recent Barn Dance Show in Maryhill.

## SUNDAY NIGHT CONCERT SERIES 10TH ANNIVERSARY

NOTE: The Russwurm family is carrying on Lynn's tradition  
of bringing live country music to the people.

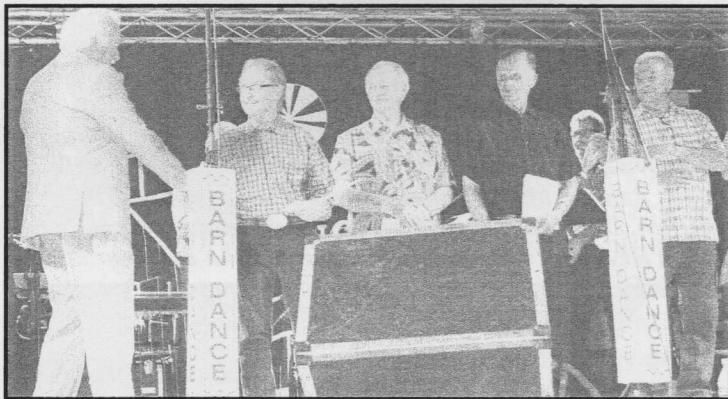
Sunday Nights 7 to 9 p.m. - Gore Park, Elmira

Bring your lawn chairs.

- July 3 - Wayne Uncer & Gid-R-Done
- July 10 - Earl Fries and The Chaparrals
- July 17 - Muir Family
- July 24 - Dianne & The Cavaliers
- July 31 - Darin Parise with Al Widmeyer
- Aug. 7 - Lance Russwurm
- Aug. 14 - Gerald Davidson & The Country Versatiles
- Aug. 21 - Emory Lester & Jill Jones Band
- Aug. 28 - Southbound with Rick Loucks
- Sept. 4 - Rhyme 'N Reason

# Country Music Memories

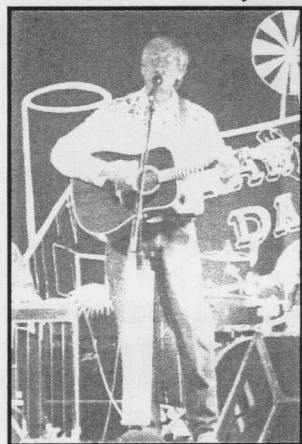
## 19th Annual Blyth Barn Dance Campout Jamboree



Barn Dance M.C., Jim Swan, presenting the Barn Dance Pioneer Award to Barn Dance fiddler, Bill Norris, along with award recipients "The Country Cousins", from L to R Royce Rhiel, Allan Rhiel, Doug McNaughton and Ron Coulthard (who was on piano at the time). Absent from the picture were John Rennie and Floyd Sillito.

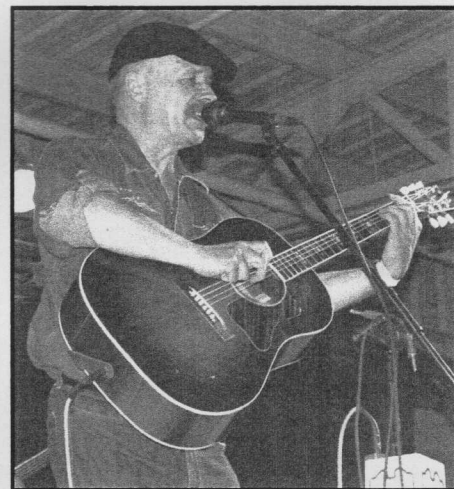
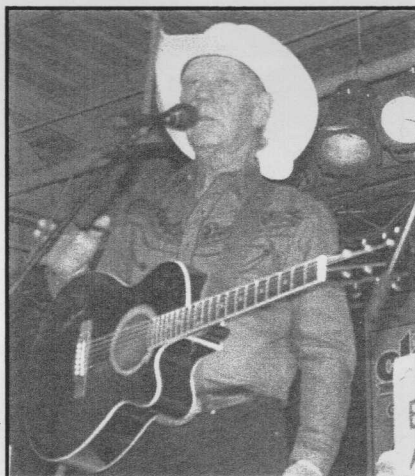


Last minute featured guests, the duo "True Love Ways" with Dale Sewers and Cathy Truelove. (replacing guest performer John Lester who was under the weather.)



Featured guest singer, Jack London, doing some John Denver classics.

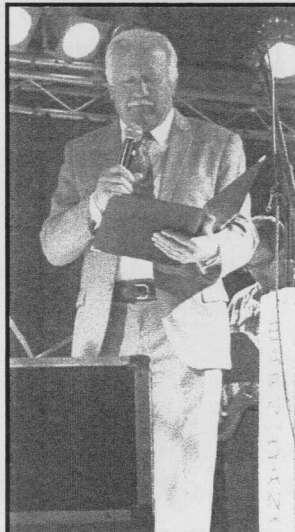
Featured guest singer, legendary country singer, Harold McIntyre.



Featured guest artist, Lance Russwurm, playing tunes from his new CD, "Self Portrait".



Featured guest singer, the lively barefootin' Traci Kennedy.



Barn Dance M.C. Jim Swan takes the spotlight while doing a recitation of "Trouble in The Amen Corner".

### 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;  
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E-mail: [webmaster@thebardance.ca](mailto:webmaster@thebardance.ca)

## COUNTRY CALENDAR



by Doreen Brown

(Toronto and surrounding area)

There will be some repeats this issue,

for those who may not have seen the last one.

\* **June 30 - July 3** - Hollyrood Country Jamboree [www.hollyroodjamboree.com](http://www.hollyroodjamboree.com) For tickets call 1-800-954-9998 and lineup.

\* **July 2 & 3** - [www.purplehillcountryhall.com](http://www.purplehillcountryhall.com) Canada's Opry Land Band Stand Show. A festival of Rural Living, honouring CCMA Awards. Sat. & Sun. camping. Saturday - Purple Hill Barn Dance Show, 8 pm; Sunday - Steve Piticco & South Mountain; also a star studded lineup of outstanding country singers for this special outdoor band stand show - 12 noon.

\* **Aug. 19, 20 & 21** - Purple Hill's Bluegrass Reunion Show. 3 days of camping featuring great Canadian bluegrass bands - New Cumberland; Stay Tuned; Rhyme and Reason; Rescue Junction; The Nelson Family; The Allen Family. Witness the Dixie Flyers in concert, a Canadian bluegrass treasure. Tailgate pickin' and jamming in the lawns of Purple Hill. Watch for Gary Michel and Bruce Hare appearances.

\* **July 8, 9 & 10** - Cargill's Pickin by the Pond. Friday - Todd Nolan and Mel Aucoin Second Line; Kylie Jo Mason Back Home Show and Band. Saturday - Scott Gathshore, tribute to Waylon with Bob Gill; Winterline; Ben Lentir; Crystal Gage; Naomi Bristow; Johnny Burke; Larry Mercey. Sunday - Winterline. Info visit [cargill.ca](http://cargill.ca) Proceeds to community projects.

\* **July 15, 16 & 17** - Queen's Bush Bluegrass Club [www.queensbush.ca](http://www.queensbush.ca) Lineup as follows: Rhyme-M-Reason; Moonshiners Daughter; Willow Ridge; Grasskyre; Shine; Tim & Doug. W/E Pass \$40.00 at gate. No advance sales. Organized by volunteers supporting bluegrass in our community. Additions - Riverbend Gentlemen; Blurry Pickers Griddle Pickers. Rough camping, food vendor, craft tables, dancing in the chicken shed Friday night. A premier quality part band from the Georgian Triangle Sat. night - an outstanding band playing your favourite country classics.

\* **Appearances by fiddle players** - Sandy & Ralph Price at Parkview Seniors Centre, 189 Blake St., Barrie, every Tuesday. Also Community Centre in Katrine.

\* **July 21 - 24** - Pickin' in the Park, Fiddle Park, Shelburne. Open mic jamborees, camping, hydro \$35.00 w/e pass. Supported by the Town of Shelburne. For information, contact Greg Holmes 519-925-3037. A weekend of fun with camping. [www.pickininthepark.webs.com](http://www.pickininthepark.webs.com)

\* **August 20** - Havelock Country Jamboree presents South Mountain with amazing fiddler

Don Reed; also Steve Piticco, Kurk Bernard, Jay Riehl and Lindsay Beckett. The Goods are also on the list. See website for further details.

\* **July 14 - 17** - Norwood Country Jamboree. 14 Alma St., Norwood Fair Grounds. See last issue for line-up or website. Tel: 1-800-954-9998 or 705-741-6097.

\* **The Music Box**, Main's Mansion, 144 Main St. N., Markham, 905-471-1114, has Performance & Requests - live on the patio, also has Country Music. [Facebook.com/musicboxgroup](http://Facebook.com/musicboxgroup)

\* **July 30** - Napanee Fair Grounds, entertainment - Lisa Hart, J. Burke, James Rice, Burnt River Band, also Al Traynor.

\* **July 28 - 31** - A special year, celebrating 25 years of Classic Country Music Reunion at Centennial Park, Trenton. Main stage Lorne Hachey Stage for open mic over the weekend; Gospel Show Sunday morning with special guest, Kiley Jo Masson. This will be a memorable weekend for many to reflect back on the first CCMR in 1992 and also who were not there to celebrate this special event. Lineup includes: Friday - Scotty Gartshore, Debbie Bechamp, Becky Elliott, Tom Mark, Paul Wasson, Wendy Lynn Snider, Host: Bill Warner; Saturday - Larry Hachey, Fred Lewis, Amberley Beatty, Neville Wells, Kiley Jo Masson, Marie Bottrell, Host: Barb Grenier; Sunday - The Tim Sanders Band, Gary Hooper, Special CCMR 25th Anniversary Tribute, Larry Mercey, Host: John Lester.

\* **July 15** - Norwood Country Jamboree, 48 Alma St., Norwood. This replaces the Lindsay Country Jamboree. Free shuttle from site to building. Showers on site. Bring your own lawn chairs. Breakfast served Fri., Sat., and Sun. by Norwood Lions Club. Dinner on Fri. & Sat. by Taylor's Custom Meals. Tel: 1-800-954-9998 or 705-741-6097.

\* **July 21** - Flinton Jamboree and Jessica Weldon will be performing during the weekend.

\* **Appearances by Doreen Brown** - Tottenham Bluegrass Festival, children judging panel; Pickin' in the Park, Shelburne; Classic Country Music Reunion; Norwood Country Jamboree; Rosemont Jam.

\* **The first Friday of the month** - commencing in September. Newmarket Seniors on Davis Drive, featuring entertainment Morley Batts. Phone 905-953-5325.

\* **Havelock Country Jamboree** Aug. 18 - 21. 17th Annual with twin stages. Appearances include Aug. 18 - Road Hammers, Chad Brownlee, Runaway Angel, Kansas Stone; Aug. 19 - Terry Clark, Sammy Kershaw, Coup de Ville, Bobby Wills, Sasha, Jordy Jackson Band; Aug. 20 - Band Perry, Scott McCreery, Jess Moskaluke, Jaydee Bixby, The Sweet Grass Band, The Good Bros., Aeon Lines, Big Tobacco and the Pickles, Melissa Payne; Aug. 21 - South Mountain, Uncle Sean and the Shirfty Drifters, Henry Norwood, Dean James Band. 1-800-539-3353.

\* **Loretta House**, Loretta, Ontario has live DJ Friday nights and Country Music Saturday nights. Located on Hwy. 50, south of Alliston.

\* **August 31** - Auction Barn Jamboree, Colborne, presents traditional country music only with Teea Goans, direct from Nashville. Opening for Teena will be Naomi Bristow and Mike Pollard. One night only. Contact Gary Warner at [gwarner@eagle.ca](mailto:gwarner@eagle.ca) for the weekend lineup.

\* **Sept. 25** - Canada's Largest Travelling Barn Dance, 2:30 pm at Southwold Complex, Shedden; and on Nov 20, 2:30 pm at Brigden Fairgrounds, Brigden.

\* **Appearances by Roger Long** - at Stratford Legion Set. 2, Nov. 19 and Dec. 17.

\* **November 12** - Steve Piticco will be appearing at Maranatha Church, Belleville.

*Thanks to all who helped look for my missing jacket. Found it. Have a great summer enjoying all the great Country Music and always thanks to all who help make all the jamborees a success.*

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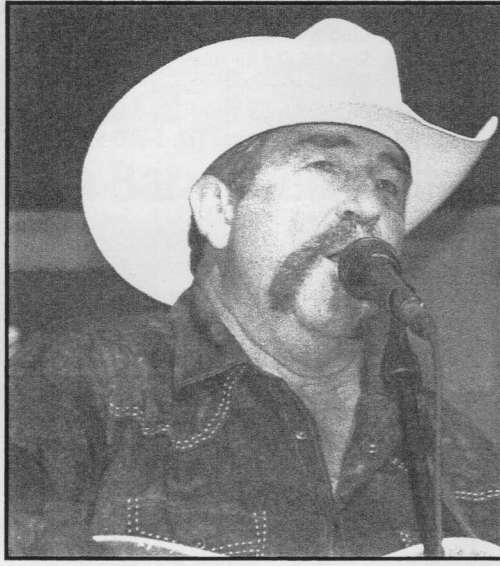
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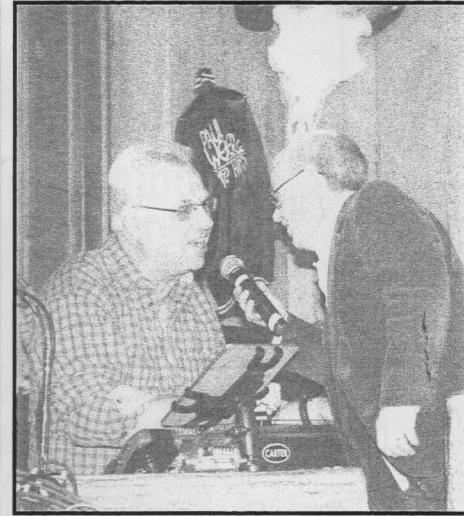
## Recent Barn Dance Show Highlights - Commercial Tavern, Maryhill



Dianne Ditner of the Cavaliers.



Host - Country Singer, Paul Weber.



Doug Dietrich and Johnny Heaman just fooling around on stage.

## BARN DANCE CORNER

by Peter Saros

Released on Epic Records in July of 1985, Merle Haggard's "Kern River" barely cracked the Top Ten. That it was ever released as a single was a small miracle. Epic, along with Columbia, was an imprint of CBS records, and CBS was then the number-one label in country music under the helm of Rick Blackburn. Merle Haggard was among his stable of fading older stars and Blackburn did not like them as a breed and "Kern River" in particular as a song. According to Haggard, Blackburn bluntly and repeatedly pointed that out to him, even going so far as to say, "Who in the hell knows where Kern River is at?"

As an 11 year old boy in suburban Minneapolis I had to agree. I didn't know where any of the places name dropped in the song were – Mount Whitney, Lake Shasta, Kern River or the south San Joaquin. But that didn't matter. The truth of the song didn't depend upon geographical familiarity. In fact, the story was

more parable than song. *Kern River* sighs with an unbearable weakness, cruelty, and hurt almost too deep for words. It flows through the heart of everyone. The song threatened to take the listener somewhere far darker and far more dangerous than a dot on any real map. Just like the river Haggard describes, the song itself wasn't deep nor wide but it was a mean piece of music.

Haggard details in heartbreaking economy the shame of being surrounded by opportunity but somehow still coming out a failure. He roots that confusion and disappointment in a broader context by specifically identifying where the seeds of suffering were first sown. The mighty Kern River relentlessly waters and nourishes those seeds destined to bare bad fruit.

It is a song of suffering. Music critic and journalist David Cantwell said, "Kern River is a scary record, maybe the scariest I know because its terror is just a synonym for the world." No wonder Blackburn the music exec didn't like it. It hurts too much to listen to.

But listen to it is all I did as a scared and lonely pre-teen boy

curled up in my bed knowing my father was doomed to die from a December diagnosis of pancreatic cancer the year before. Cantwell again said, "Merle's record screamed quiet and startled you alive." I wore out an 8-track version of the album and abused a cassette copy of it as well, terrified of what life without my father would be like.

I was a boy as powerless and helpless before a disease as the narrator was before a river when the Kern swept his lover's life away beneath the moonlight.

Cancer or cruel river, what's the difference when you have lost your best friend?

Thankfully Dolly Parton finds purpose in the seemingly senseless suffering of it all. On the *Kern River* album Haggard includes a cover of Her "Old Flames (Can't Hold a Candle to You)" when she offers how holding memories helped her not feel so alone.

In the cold hard light of ships now seemingly constantly going out of traditional country music's harbour, let's hold on to those precious memories.