



# The Barn Dance Opera Journal



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## BILL "SLIM" MCCLORY CANADA'S VERSATILE COWBOY ENTERTAINER

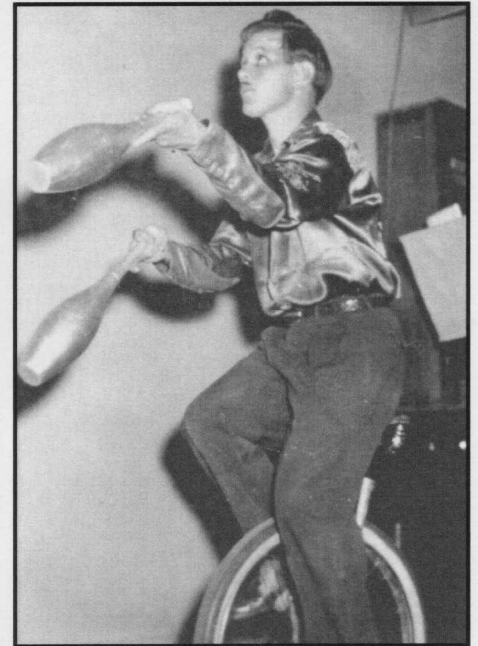
by Grant Heywood



Bill "Slim" McClory, cowboy entertainer/extraordinaire.



Bill "Slim" McClory's wife eating fire.



Bill "Slim" McClory, juggling while riding a unicycle.

With all of the protests and pandemic news, I thought it would be refreshing to write a story about someone who really took entertainment to soaring heights back in the day. I've wanted to write a story about *Bill, 'Slim' McClory* for quite some time now. Tracking down any past history on this intriguing entertainer from Monkton, Ontario has been unsuccessful. I will just have to tell you what I know through past memories. I'll start by just touching on a bit of entertainment history in our area during post W.W. II.

The entertainment options in the 1940's and 1950's revolved around listening to the radio, playing check-

ers or going to watch, listen, and dance to live entertainment. Televisions were expensive, and really didn't take off until the mid- 1950's. Prior to television, entertainment usually involved live concerts, dances, or sporting events. In mid-western Ontario, the CKNX Traveling Barn Dance was in its 'heyday' from the mid 1940's to the late 1950's. Many musical artists and singers were featured performers on the Barn Dance stage, and some went on to become famous.

There were many entertainers of high caliber in mid-western Ontario during the mid-1940's into the 1950's. For instance, local celebrities

Lucky Lott & his brother became popular in Canada & the U.S. as stunt drivers with the thrilling *Hell Drivers*.

Their daredevil stunts included driving cars on two wheels sideways, ramp jumps & roll overs, and driving through a wall of flames. Eventually, Lucky Lott bought a dancehall in Stratford, Ontario, and then purchased the Sebringvilla Hotel in Sebringville. Lucky passed away in 1998.

In the 1950's, my dad (Earl Heywood) was having considerable suc-

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## The Editor Speaks

by Grant Heywood

By now everyone is likely conditioned to being isolated, seeing each other less, being bored, tired of television and movie re-runs, having regular naps, smiling at the vehicle gas gauge, being bored, not winning arguments with your better half (wives), playing board games, playing bored games, fixing everything around the house, doing yard work for the umpteenth time, trying every recipe in the cookbook, phoning more, eating more, being bored more, trying to find a room in the house to hide, or maybe appreciating nature, silence, relaxing, turning off the news channel, laughing more, smiling more, or re-discovering a hobby, or maybe even re-discovering yourself. My wife and I have re-discovered our wii game, and go bowling almost every day. Doing something together that's fun, and getting some exercise too.

But these are uncertain times, and we must make the best of it. Unfortunately, for some, patience is not on everyone's agenda. Many of our southern neighbors believe that freedom means flaunting the law, ignoring authority, and ignoring science. I believe the biggest problem with people who are restless and reckless during this pandemic, is that they fail to educate themselves about history. I have said this before and I'll say it again, we can only forge a better future by learning from our past mistakes. We've had pandemics before, and we've been through hard times before as well. In my opinion, many of today's generation under 60 have never experienced hard times, or been through an actual world crisis.

I say, under 60, because those of us over 60 have either experienced such things or have been taught by our elders what it was like when there was a pandemic, or experiencing polio, or the great depression or living through a world war, or rationing food. Much of today's society, have had the good fortune of having almost anything they want. Yes they've worked hard, but some feel entitled to wear the badge of the 'ME' generation. It's all about climbing the ladder of success, having two brand new SUV's, a new house, a TV in every room, a \$2,000 BBQ, unlimited internet access, a cottage, a new trailer, brand new sports equipment for the kids, the latest ipad, granite countertops, cell phones for all, dining out 3 or 4 times a week, flying to Florida or the Caribbean twice a year... and on, and on.

We are very fortunate in today's world, but those who pursue this lifestyle could lose their dream world at the collapse of a credit card account, cutbacks or layoffs at their job, bank default or foreclosure, medical emergency, house or tax arrears, or maybe even worse... a depression or worse yet, a pandemic. This is a time to reflect on our behavior and hopefully, find a better way to live after this is all over. Learn to be patient, be kind, be thankful, and become active in things that really matter to everyone, and not just yourself. My grandparents were neither, selfish or greedy. They taught me how to re-use and re-cycle long before it was a trend. I learned patience, kindness, compassion, and above all, helping those who were less fortunate. I believe getting back to these values would go a long way in forging a better world today.

Appreciating what we have is a first step. This pandemic will be a wake-up call for many of us. Some of us will lose loved ones from COVID-19 and we may have to live under restricted conditions for

some time. But we will persevere. Hope is our ally, and listening to those who know what's best would be prudent. We will be going to movie theatres again, dine out again, travel again, and hug again. We will be going out to hear live music again as well. Music is therapy, and before you know it the Barn Dance performers on stage will be soothing your eardrums, making your toes tap, and putting a smile on your face. Hopefully, not too many sleeps until we get to see all of our friends at the next Barn Dance. It can't come soon enough. I look forward to it.

Comments? Please contact:  
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### 2021 COMING EVENTS

Date	Event Name	Place
May, 2021	23rd Annual Campout Jamoree	Blyth Arena and Campgrounds, Blyth
June 19, 2021	Barn Dance Show - 7:00 p.m.	Elma-Logan Arena, Monkton

*Continued from Page 1*

ness as a cowboy singer/recording artist, mainly in Canada. My mom and dad started the *Heywood Family* as an entertainment troupe during this time as well. As a duo, my mom & dad would perform a gay nineties act, sing country & gospel songs, and my dad would perform magic & rope tricks. My sister Pat would sing and tap dance & do baton twirling acrobatics, and I was at that time, advertised as Canada's Youngest Recording artist at 7 years of age. Recording for RCA, the *Heywood Family* became well known and would tour throughout Ontario and the Maritimes.

My dad would always talk about a husband and wife duo from Monkton, Ontario, at that time, known as *Bill 'Slim' McClory, Canada's Cowboy Entertainer*. Bill was also a songwriter and recording artist as well. The couple would tour fairs, festivals and events all over Ontario. Although I only saw them perform once in my life, I was completely astounded and engaged in their performance. It was like nothing I'd ever seen, almost a surreal fantasy dream, a circus sideshow if you will. A virtual variety show, including a pet monkey that could dance & perform tricks onstage. Bill and his wife were multi-instrumentalists, and would sing cowboy type songs, and then Bill's wife would turn it around and engage in a fire eating routine. Bill was also a master juggler and could juggle while balancing himself on a unicycle. They were like stars from the Ed Sullivan television Show performing live in your own hometown.

*Bill McClory* was also a master magician. He would perform many magic illusions with his wife, including sawing a woman in half and mystifying Houdini type escapes. Bill's versatility as an entertainer became well known throughout Ontario. But



*Bill "Slim" McClory, performing roping tricks.*

one of his most fascinating attributes was his mastery of spinning ropes, and various roping techniques. Many of these roping performances were garnered from many of the famous cowboys in western movies during that era. Bill was undoubtedly one of the best. He kept his audience transfixed, as he spun a huge spinning rope loop that he would jump and skip through, & in and out of. Bill and his wife excelled at banjo, guitar, saxophone, mandolin, which they always played in their stage show. It seemed there wasn't anything this duo couldn't do.

My mom and dad would always talk about *Bill McClory*, and when they weren't on tour, my parents would either go see Bill & his wife perform. I believe they had them over to our house one evening as guests. As a kid of 6 or 7 years old, I was fascinated by this 'larger than life' variety show duo, who kept me completely enthralled and totally mesmerized. You have to understand, that I had only seen things like this in a circus setting or in the movies. In my opinion, they were local legends. It was hard to believe that

they came from little ole Monkton, Ontario.

Later, in my dad's career, he would incorporate magic illusions as well as escape tricks, and bullwhip maneuvers into his show. Dad also learned trick roping techniques not unlike *Bill McClory*. I have no doubt that he tried to emulate many of the same routines that Bill had been doing for years. So I wasn't the only one fascinated and captured by *Bill 'Slim' McClory*. He was an entertainer that knew no bounds and certainly left a lasting memory with me and my dad.

To this day, I have no history about Bill or his wife (including her name). I don't even know of any kinfolk or where they are buried. In my opinion, there should be an archival record or documentation on this uniquely captivating Canadian performing duo somewhere. It is unfortunate that some people who leave an indelible impression on your life, and who you consider to be truly stars of their time, just vanish without a trace. They are gone now, and relegated to history. But they left so many enduring memories with those who saw them.... especially me.

*If anyone knows of, or has seen Bill 'Slim' McClory perform, or has a story, from those days of yesteryear, please drop me a line. I would love to hear from you.*

## 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.  
 NOG 2W0;  
 or call 519-530-8000

*E-mail:*  
 webmaster@thebardance.ca

# WHO REMEMBERS THIS?

by Grant Heywood

Communication has certainly come a long way since the days of smoke signals and delivering messages by passenger pigeons. Some folks might even think we were better off back then, without the barrage of high tech devices and computers, to instantly put us in contact with each other and the rest of the world. It was simpler times for sure, but I'd bet most people would find it difficult surviving today without their cellphone or e-mail. As kids, it was easier to communicate with two cans tied to a string.

For centuries, we have always felt the need to be in contact with each other. News usually travelled quite slowly prior to the industrial revolution. It might be days or even weeks before people on the other side of the world would get the news of a major catastrophe, or even news that someone in the family had passed away. Sending and receiving mail was the communication of choice for many years, which was an extension of the biblical days of a messenger travelling by foot with a message written on a papyrus scroll

Eventually, people would read about news in a newspaper or send and receive mail delivered on horseback, and then the steam locomotive. It took days and weeks to send or receive mail abroad by steamship, until airplanes came along. During the First and Second World Wars, getting a postcard or letter gave people a connection of romance, hope and often despair. The invention of Morse code in the mid to late 1800's prompted people to send message via telegraph. It was nostalgic to say the least, until the invention of the telephone, which put people in contact with each other almost instantly. Of course there was a substantial cost involved with long distance by phone, and many people were on what was called a 'party line'. That was when several people shared a common telephone line and you couldn't use your phone if someone else was using the

party line connection. It also meant that you could listen in on conversations of others that might be personal and private.

There is a select group of people throughout the world who operate Ham radio sets, and are able to communicate to others throughout the world on a special radio frequency. Although it was prevalent in the war years, it has become somewhat of a fraternity and these Ham radio operators would continue to be helpful of worldwide news should any of our other high tech systems fail. Army surplus walkie talkies were the only means of wireless communication and were limited to short distances. Mail and telephone were our major means of communication until everything changed with the invention of the silicon chip.

With the silicon chip, came the high tech revolution in the late 70's into the 80's. Once computers were mass produced to the general public, it wasn't long before the world-wide web became the new information highway to communication via e-mail. Wireless telephones led to mobile cell phones and then laptops and tablet devices with the capability of a personal computer.

Today we communicate via, e-mail, Facebook messenger, Instagram, Twitter, and receive messages in an instant at the push of a send button. There will likely be a few who yearn for the old days of just using a land line telephone or Canada Post. But even Canada Post was on the brink of extinction when delivery services like Fed Ex, Purolator, UPS, and others diminished their mail and package services. Then along came Amazon.com, and Canada Post's revenue soared once again through online deliveries. Amazon, Wayfair, Shopify, and others prompted almost every major retailer to offer online shopping. It made it difficult for the 'mom & pop' stores to compete, especially with the advent of big box stores like Home Depot, Best Buy, Ikea, Costco, and so

# NEWS & NOTES

♫ Jimmy Capps, backup guitarist with the Grand Ole Opry band has passed away at the age of 81. Jimmy had played with the Grand Ole Opry house band for over 50 years. He has played on numerous studio hits and recordings, and got his start as a guitarist with the Louvin Brothers. He was inducted into the Musician's Hall Of Fame in 2014.

♫ Katherine Williams Dunning, 27, youngest of 5 siblings and daughter of Hank Williams Jr., died as a result of a motor vehicle accident in Tennessee. Her husband was also in the vehicle at the time of the crash and survived.

♫ Country band Lady Antebellum has had 8 albums and been on the scene for 14 years. The band decided to change their name recently to Lady A. (the name Antebellum is associated with slavery.) The decision was made by the band members after the recent Black Lives Matter protests throughout the U.S. and around the world.

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many others.

It is a changing world in which we live and these changes have happened at an accelerated rate. We have become comfortable with our high tech communication devices, our ability to access anything we want whenever we want, and the mass consumerism of shopping choices. This rapid pace has led to profit margins in the billions for many of these corporate industries. Are we better off for it? I don't know. But I've always been wary of too much too soon and wonder if there is a price to be paid down the line. Seems like most folks these days can't afford what they've got as they live beyond their means. As the Rolling Stones song goes... 'You Can't Always Get What You Want'... 'but if you try sometime, you'll get what you need'.

# WHAT IF THERE WAS NO MUSIC

by Grant Heywood

When my wife and I had moved back from Toronto in the early 80's, I was looking for a day job, as I had just come off the road as a full time musician. I took a job with a small landscaping company from the New Hamburg area. I remember being on lunch break at a client's home, and I was listening to music on the radio while sitting in the driver's seat of the work truck. My boss didn't particularly take a shine to me, although I did my work diligently. In a very firm voice, he came over to the truck and told me to turn the radio off. (This guy didn't even like birds singing) I told him I was taking my lunch break and liked listening to the music, which was not all that loud. He demanded I turn the music off and told me the world would be a much better place without music in it.

I was aghast! I complied because I really needed the job, but could not understand his distaste for music. I had never, ever met anyone who did not like music. It still haunts me to this day, and now here I am in 2020, unable to play music to people who love to listen. It is almost like a curse for most musicians since they cannot play live music venues and events like they used to. Musicians are only some of the people who have lost their jobs because of Covid 19. It is almost a sure bet, that musicians may be the last to see their jobs return to whatever the new normal will be when this pandemic has finally ended.

Some musicians have used social media to convey their musical talents to whoever will listen. It is an avenue that is lonesome for the musicians. Not having a live audience is virtually like playing for your own entertainment. Oh it's nice to get the likes and comments from those who appreciate and crave live music, but it's only a temporary fix, and just a mirror image of the real deal. It's comforting to see so many musicians playing in duos or solo online, and gives many a sense of being together or a familiar song will induce fond memories. But it's not some-

thing that will last, as it's not tangible and just not the same as performing live.

My sister told me that it's like the folks who are confined to being in a nursing home. Maybe we can't get in to see them... but they can't get out! They are used to seeing a smile on a nurse's face or a friendly touch of the hand, as these are things many seniors long for, as an expression of love and caring. Well guess what? They can't see that smile anymore because of a facial mask, and they can't feel that touch through a latex glove. Let's hope that their last years in this situation don't drag on much longer. It would be sad to experience the loneliness of no interaction with family and friends ever again. I used to perform at the nursing home where my mother resides, and it was always a pleasure to see the smiling faces or foot tapping when I played a familiar song. Not anymore, and who knows when that kind of entertainment will return.

Musicians are also contemplating their future as many depend on regular performances and touring for a living. When this pandemic has finally moved on, I'm concerned what the musical landscape will look like. There will be many venues that will not be able to afford live music, and there may be many concerts and performances with fewer in the audience because of distancing, or even a general fear of well-being in a somewhat uncomfortable environment that used to be normal at one time. Musicians, especially bands of 4 or more members, will find it tough to divide an evening's earnings that barely pays half a tank of gas. That could possibly be a grim reality. Let's hope not.

But the 'new normal' will take ingenuity on the part of many musicians, so that they can adapt to a different way of making performances work and be cost effective. Singles, duos, and trios will definitely be suited for many situations

simply because they are already downsized to accommodate smaller crowds, smaller venue size, and can still afford to earn more than gas money. It may be awhile before the larger concert scene comes back if this pandemic continues or a vaccine isn't found soon.

Many musicians, including myself, have been writing songs, recording at home, or practicing/playing with other musicians through zoom on the internet. I don't doubt when this is all over, there will be a lot of new recorded music from many musicians who have pent up frustrations that have been put to song. This will be a bonus for music lovers, who I encourage to buy a new cd or two when musicians start up again.

If you think you're lonely now, just think of a world without music. What a dark lonely place that would be. I look forward to performing and singing again and have high hopes that our audience will feel the same and come out and support the musicians that truly give of themselves just to be appreciated. You may see a return of the 'Tip Jar' as well. Please be generous and value the musical talent. It's another way to show your appreciation for a job well done. Music really does make the world a better place. It soothes the soul and it's what is needed to get us through tough times. It has before and it most certainly will again.



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# MUSIC & MEMORIES



*CKNX Barn Dance backstage (late 1950's) left to right Comedian Wee Bobby Clark, Earl Heywood and Al Cherny.*



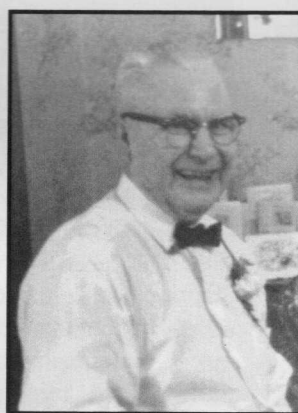
*Singing sweetheart of the CKNX of the Barn Dance and Circle 8 Ranch, Sharon Strong in the 1950's.*



*The Ranch Boys Quartet at the Rainbow Room in Owen Sound in the 1950s. (left to right) Rossy Mann, Ernie King, Don Robertson, Reg Bitton.*



*Backstage at a Barn Dance performance around 1998 (left to right) Martha Heywood, with granddaughters Janessa Heywood, Kianna Heywood and Earl Heywood.*



*CKNX Barn Dance square dance caller, Geordie Jordan.*



*After a CKNX Barn Dance performance in the 1950's (left to right) Martha Heywood, Earl Heywood, Lynn Russwurm and Laura Russwurm.*



*Barn Dance Journal columnist/entertainer, Doreen Brown with Martha Heywood at a Blyth Barn Dance Campout Jamboree (2009).*

*From left to right - Legendary singing Newfoundlander, Michael T. Wall, backstage with country legend George Jones, and Micky McGivern (Stompin' Tom gr. player) at the Edison Hotel, Toronto (1960's)* →





## Country Calendar

by Doreen Brown  
(Toronto and  
surrounding area)

# RANDY OWEN CELEBRATES 40 YEARS ON RADIO

Greetings,  
During this transition, for me, my guitar is my friend to enjoy strumming around the house or for neighbours.

I will miss, very much the annual shows this year; our Barn Dance, Tottenham Bluegrass, Shelburne Fiddle weekend, The Trenton Annual Shows Gary Hooper's Annual get together,

Sending Best Wishes to all the above, and hope this virus will soon be over so we can get back to enjoying live country music together once again. Take care and be safe.

Country Cheers,  
*Doreen Brown*

Around June 1980 while attending Niagara College, Randy Owen was hired as a part-time DJ on wknds. at radio station CHOW, in his home town of Welland, Ontario. His career in country music radio also included a long stint on country music radio in Kitchener, Ontario as well. His background and knowledge of country music is vast, and his love of Canadian country music knows no bounds. He is like an approachable friend with a big heart and smile, who has shared many stages as an emcee for several major country performers.

Randy has been a promoter of Canadian country music forever, and has won many awards during his career, as well as hosting CCMA events, Ontario Country Music Awards, and introducing well known, and up and coming Canadian country artists. He has been an exemplary figure in the country music community, with an old school heart, and a genuine desire to help promote new up and coming Canadian country music talent. Oh yeah, and Randy has been known to sing a Johnny Cash tune onstage whenever he's asked. You can often catch Randy as host of the Purple Hill Country Opry in Thorndale, operated by Anna & George Taylor.

Currently, Randy is an on-air DJ

at Country 107.3 in Tillsonburg, Ontario. When he's not promoting country music, Randy also likes to spend time exploring and uncovering clues about the JFK assassination. 40 years is a milestone for a radio career for sure. Randy was asked to share his secret for a long and successful career and he said as he smiled... "Enjoy the journey, because the destination may not be that hot!" Congratulations Randy, on your 40 year anniversary of broadcasting.



Radio personality, Randy Owen holding his CCMA Award.

## THE BARN DANCE MUSEUM

The Barn Dance Museum at 273 Josephine St. Wingham, is **temporarily closed** until further notice. Sorry for the inconvenience.



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# BARN DANCE CORNER

by Peter Saros

When so many on line platforms are geared towards one way of thinking, a "right" opinion, or a you're- either-with-us or-against-us-mindset, it is hard not to root and stump for a country music advocate whose YouTube tag-line reads: Trying to think critically about country music without being a jerk.

Grady Smith is a refreshing blast of honesty and passion. Country music matters to him. A former print journalist who previously wrote for *Taste of Country* and *Rolling Stone*, while also becoming the *de facto* country music expert at *Entertainment Weekly* and *The Guardian*, Smith now dedicates most of his attention and energy to the videos he produces for his YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/user/goGradygo>).

On that channel he does his most generous work honoring tradition while simultaneously championing new music. His curiosity about what country music means across generations should be of particular interest to the readership of this journal.

Country music lives on Grady Smith's channel. It breathes. It has room to grow. It looks backward but is not prisoner to the past. It hopes the brightest days might be yet to come. He is at his best wading through the confusing mess of country sub-genres and sounds. I believe he sincerely wants to connect the past to the future and hold it all together. His work is ecumenical and generous rather than clan-

nish and small.

His honesty and willingness to acknowledge his gaps in his country credentials and history set him firmly apart from so much of the other more authoritative on-line voices speaking on behalf of country music purity and tradition.

I was most interested by the videos he made with his younger sister and his parents. He does an excellent job of gauging what country music means to non-die-hard country music listeners. Moreover, he is smart enough to know why not constantly pandering to your base matters by learning what is going on out there on the frontiers of the genre.

Smith should also be commended for his interviews with young new country stars like Gabe Lee, Ashley McBryde, and Kip Moore. His passion for the music trumps any false sense of distanced objectivity. His work reminds me of what musician and music journalist Peter Cooper wrote in his book titled *Johnny's Cash and Charley's Pride: Lasting Legends and Untold Adventures in Country Music*. Smith gives life to Cooper's belief that the only way to find clarity is to reject objectivity. In so many of his videos Smith allows himself to, "experience the moment, to feel something, and then convey that feeling." At his best he captures the spirit of Russ Barnard, Patrick Carr, Rich Kienzle, et al. in *Country Music* magazine's heydays of country music journalism.

Why mention a thirty-something YouTuber in *The Barn*

*Dance Opera Journal*? I share Grady Smith with you because I think he can make you feel something different than you may have felt before about contemporary country music. It might be hope. It might be nostalgia.

*The show must go on...*

## BARN DANCE JOURNAL

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