



THE BARN DANCE OPERA JOURNAL

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ONTARIO'S HARDEST WORKING COUNTRY MUSIC ARTIST/BAND GERALD DAVIDSON & THE COUNTRY VERSATILES CELEBRATE 57 YEARS *by Grant Heywood*

Country singers and bands come and go, and then there is Gerald Davidson and the Country Versatiles. When it comes to longevity, it's no doubt this band are on top, celebrating almost more years of playing than the Rolling Stones. Fifty seven years to be exact. That's a long time to keep a band together. So what prompted Plattsville born, Gerald Davidson to become a country singer?

Gerald was the 2nd of ten children. He started singing at age 12 and never looked back. Country music was part of the family and Gerald learned how to play guitar on his brother's old flat top. He listened to country singers like Eddy Arnold back then, but Gerald's favourite country singer was Gene Watson. He started playing in his Dad's band before venturing out on his own. Gerald moved to Woodstock and sang locally through the 50's & early 60's. He went on to win first place at the Simcoe Singing Contest in '75 & '76. The Country Versatiles were formed in 1964 with Gerald, singer/gtr., Wayne Riehl, fiddle, and Len Love, piano. Besides performing across Canada and the U.S., Gerald and the Country Versatiles had a T.V. show called Good Time Country, with Gerald, Wayne, Len, and Jack London, ap-



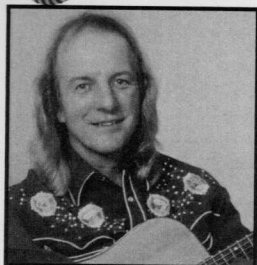
George Webb, Gord Ogilvie, Ashley Giles, Gerald Davidson, and Wes Dymond

pearing on CKNX T.V. in Wingham, Ont.. The show won the CAN-PRO award in '79/'80. Special guest, Shania Twain, also performed earlier on in her career, on the Good Time Country T.V. show.

I personally, remember becoming a part of the original Country

Versatiles back in the 1990's. Gerald asked me to come out to play drums and sing, with Len and Wayne at various Legion Halls and events in the area. They would always draw a crowd and we often joked onstage which kept everyone entertained. Working with the Country Versatiles for several

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*The
Editor
Speaks*

by Grant Heywood

Time sure does fly when you're retired, as it just seems like summer started and here we are into the fall season. Needless to say it was a summer of discontent for many, with wildfires, flooding, the odd tornado and heat waves. This likely doesn't bode well for future weather conditions as climate change seems to be on everyone's mind these days.

You can't say we didn't know about climate change, as scientists have been warning us of the results of airborne pollution heating up the earth's temperature for at least the last 50 or 60 years or more. Since the 1960's we have been told we only have a small window, in years, to fix this problem, and yet we continue go on about our daily lives as though politicians and big corporations are going to fix this dilemma. The time has passed when we could have actually thwarted the climate crisis, and now we are long past the due date and our only hope is to manage this global issue.

With the looming climate crisis, the COVID pandemic, skyrocketing house prices, inflation, extreme weather patterns, and people in fear who turn on each other because of their politics, race, or ethnicity, you'd think we were living in some kind of science fiction movie. But these problems are real, and it will take all of us

and many years to overcome our adversities. We sometimes seem complacent at times, but our concerns are warranted if we are to leave our children a better world in which to live.

Speaking of children, the Heywood family has grown to include a new grandson, Charles Ferguson Soulliere', who is now a little over 4 months old. Everything everyone told us about having a grandchild was true. We are truly blessed and little Charlie is the light of our life. The cute little guy is quite responsive to music when I play guitar or sing to him. Who knows, maybe he'll continue on the family tradition of music when he is a bit older. For the time being though, we are just happy to have our first grandchild in our lives. He certainly makes our day a whole lot brighter. Janessa and Ed are the proud parents.

During August and September of this year, I have been busy performing outdoor concerts, within gov't guidelines of course. Although I haven't played any country concerts, the rock and blues bands I play with, have had a bit of a run lately. I can't complain, as it has been great to get out and do what I love most, perform and entertain in front of a live audience at festivals and concerts. Seeing the smile on the many faces listening to music makes it all worthwhile. It's been over a year and a half, and I feel the anguish that most musicians feel, not being able to play live music on a regular basis. I really hope that by the early part of 2022, we will all be listening to live music once again.

Most of the Barn Dance shows

that were postponed because of the COVID pandemic, have been re-scheduled for 2022. It will be a joy, once again to gather with friends country music fans at a Barn Dance Show. It's really been a long, long, time off from playing country music shows to say the least. If the musicians feel the pain, I can only guess how eager the audience will be to attend the next Barn Dance performance. Hope to see everyone at our first Barn Dance Show in 2022. Please check our schedule below or at thebardance.ca for more information.

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or send a message on facebook.*

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2022 COMING EVENTS

Date	Event Name	Place
May, 2022	23rd Annual Campout Jamoree	Blyth Arena and Campgrounds, Blyth
Sept. 17, 2022	Barn Dance Show	Elma-Logan Arena, Monkton

Continued on Page 1

months gave me a sense of pride. These guys were good players and fun to play with, and Gerald was a strong traditional country singer. It's no wonder they had a fantastic following all of these years. It was a sad day when Len Love and Wayne Rhiel passed on. An end of an era for the original Country Versatiles, but Gerald soldiered on with the next version of the band.

When Gerald had to reform the band, he brought in Tony Leggio on steel gtr., from the Hamilton area, who had played with Wilf Carter at one time. When Tony passed on steel player George Webb came on board. Gerald used the services of several musicians, such as fiddler, Doug McNaughton, & Randy Morrison, drummers, Kerry Jackson, Lloyd Mercey, myself, and multi-instrumentalist Al Widmeyer. Recently, the Country Versatiles lost drummer of 7 years, Gerry Felker, in 2019.

Gerald Davidson and the Country Versatiles really hit it big when they were on the weekly Good Time Country television show on CKNX in Wingham. It ran from 1979 til 1986 and guests included Shania Twain, Al Cherney, The Walters Family, Myrna Lorrie, to name a few. Gerald was no stranger to television, and appeared many times on Western Roundup & Circle 8 Ranch on CKNX in the 1960's. He won many singing contests and also appeared on London & Kitchener television programs as well. He worked with many Grand Ole Opry stars like, David Houston, Red Sovine, Stonewall Jackson, and Canadian stars like, Tommy Hunter, Carrol Baker, Dallas Harms, and others. Gerald has performed from Nashville to Texas, but continues to keep rooted in playing all over southwestern Ontario.

Gerald has also performed on Canada's Largest Travelling Barn

Dance, and received the Barn Dance Pioneer Award onstage in 2002. He has three albums to his credit: *If I Ever Need A Lady*, *Still Country*, and his latest disc, *Gerald Davidson & the Country Versatiles Celebrating 50 Years in Country Music*. This third cd was recorded and produced at the late Doug Deveaux's studio in Oshawa. It features Gerald at his best as well as a duet with fiddler/singer, Ashley Giles.

Today, the Country Versatiles, feature Kirkton born, Ashley Giles on fiddle/vocals. Ashley completed a Bachelor of Music degree at U of Wtloo. and has won many trophies and travelled the continent with many well-known acts. Drummer, Wesley Dymond of Strathroy, is a graduate of the Wilfred Laurier's music program, and has toured Canada with the Scott Woods Band three times. Steel guitarist, George Webb is from the Toronto area and supported his musical habit on guitar by working at IBM. George started playing steel guitar in 1977 and plays a lot of 'old school' country. A fine player, George has played with many country artists in Ontario. Bassist/singer, Gord Ogilvie of Kitchener, has had a colourful musical career. He played for two years with Hot Off the Press and then played with the Award winning Mercey Brothers, playing Nashville, the CCMA Awards, touring Canada and the U.S. He also worked with the likes of George Jones, Tanya Tucker, and Freddie Fender to name a few. He started with the Country Versatiles in 2004.

Gerald Davidson and the Country Versatiles play traditional country music and they play it very well. They are usually booked a year in advance and continue to be a part of the Canadian country music scene. They've been known to play as far east as the Fox Mountain Festival in Nova Scotia upon

request, and still appear at local Legions, arenas, outdoor events and festivals. Fifty seven years is a long time to play the kind of country music you love. But then again, their audience loves it too. There's a reason they've been around for so long. They just know what kind of music people want and they just keep getting better at playing it. Here's to 57 years with Gerald Davidson and the Country Versatiles. Ontario's hardest working country music band. You've earned it.

To find out more about Gerald Davidson and the Country Versatiles, go to: www.countryversatiles.com



*The original Versatiles:
Len Love, Wayne Riehl,
and Gerald Davidson*

BOOKING THE BARN DANCE

If you are interested in more information about booking the Barn Dance Musical Production, please write to:

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P.O. Box 68, Wingham,
Ont. N0G 2W0;*

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E-mail:

webmaster@thebardance.ca

WHO REMEMBERS THIS?

by Grant Heywood

In the 1950's and 1960's, kid's cereals almost became the breakfast of choice. It was around this time that hockey and baseball cards became quite popular. There was something about opening a pack of hockey cards and smelling that sweet smell of a flat piece of bubble gum that was included with the cards. In fact, a lot of bubble gum manufacturers included a prize, such as hockey or baseball cards, to sell their product. Sometimes you'd get a free temporary tattoo with bubble gum or Bazooka Joe comic. Popeye candy cigarettes were all the rage along with wax lips, liquid filled wax cigars and even giant jawbreaker bubble gum balls. You wouldn't see that around in today's world.

But it was the fascination of getting a free toy in a box of cereal that you taunted your mother into buying at the local grocery store. Some of the most popular cereals from the 1960's where, Fruit Loops, Cap'n Crunch, Lucky Charms, etc. You know, all that sugar coated cereal goodness. Was it any wonder we antagonized our mother's into buying cereal that might include such toys as a magnifying glass, secret decoder, puz-

zle, or even a yo-yo, glow in the dark pen, or even a tiny rocket ship.

Even the regular cereal's like Shredded Wheat, Corn Flakes and Cheerios got involved with toy incentives in the cereal box. And if you didn't like the cereal, you might pester your mom into buying it just because it included a free prize that you just had to have. I remember when they had a plastic sub and frogman that you would remove a cap from and fill it with baking soda. When you placed it in water, in the tub or sink, the sub/frogman would sink to the bottom and then float to the top. It didn't take much to entertain small minds back then.

One of the things that enticed young kids about cereals in those days, was sending in the box top from the cereal to receive a special gift. I recall Nabisco Shredded Wheat running a promotion whereby you had to send in 4 or 5 box tops to receive the 'Here's Howe' book about famous Detroit Red Wing hockey player, Gordie Howe. I was thrilled when I got my copy as a kid, and later on in life I was sad to hear that my wife put it in a garage sale. It did, however, get bought by a

young kid who was just as enthralled as I was back when I got it, so it went to a good home.

Cereal companies discontinued putting free toys in cereal boxes starting in the late 1980's. The reason for this was that many of the toys were deemed a choking hazard and safety concerns soon demanded recalls and eventually the end of cereal toy freebies. It's interesting to note that some of these toys have become collectibles such as hockey and baseball cards fetching big money. Airplane wheel and car wheel collections that were free when you bought Jello, are also collectible. But who ever thought that the actual cereal box would become a collectible item. Don't be surprised to see something like this on the PBS Antiques Roadshow. Recently, a Cheerio's cereal box from 2009 fetched a whopping \$500. Whoever thought that a cardboard box would be worth that much. Guess I'll have to sort through my recyclable cardboard waste before I throw it out next time. Maybe that pizza or Amazon box will be worth a small fortune someday.

MATRIARCH OF THE BARN DANCE, MARTHA HEYWOOD, PASSES AWAY

by Grant Heywood

Martha Heywood, was the wife and singing partner of my dad, Earl Heywood, & mother to me and my sister Patricia. Martha was 97 years old and resided at Pinecrest Manor in Lucknow. She was recently in declining health and passed away suddenly on September 17th.

She will be sadly missed and fondly remembered by family and friends. An article on Martha's life will be included in the Winter edition of the next Barn Dance Opera Journal.



IN MEMORIAM

Oshawa guitarist/singer/producer, Doug Deveaux passed away recently. He was an in demand musician who worked with Rick Jones's 'Gone Country' band. He will be missed by partner Angela, family and friends.

C.C.M.A. AWARDS PRE SHOW BLOG

by Grant Heywood

This year the Canadian Country Music Awards will be held in London, Ont. I was recently contacted about a show affiliated with the CCMA's, that will be showcasing Canadian country music artists who have served or been involved with Canadian Military Service or have even served in the war. The show will feature several country artists who have either been in the military or even entertained the troops.

My Dad, Earl Heywood, trained in Chatham at the army barracks back in the 1940's and also entertained many of the troops as well. While in training, my Dad wrote a song called *Living In The Army*. The song was one of the first songs he sang at the Princess Theatre in London, Ont. back in the 1940's. The song became popular amongst the troops and received airplay throughout Great Britain as well. *Living In The Army* is going to be used for this show when it is broadcast. I don't have any details when it will be finalized for broadcast as of yet. I will try to get more information and possibly post it on thebardance.ca website when I have more details.

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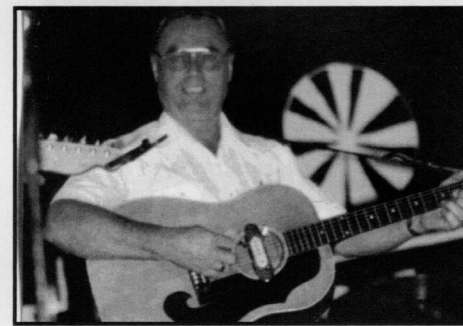
MUSIC & MEMORIES



Late 1930's. One of the first CKNX studio Barn Dance broadcasts. L to R – Cec Merkle, Clare Adlam, Pauline Swanson, and Cora Robertson.



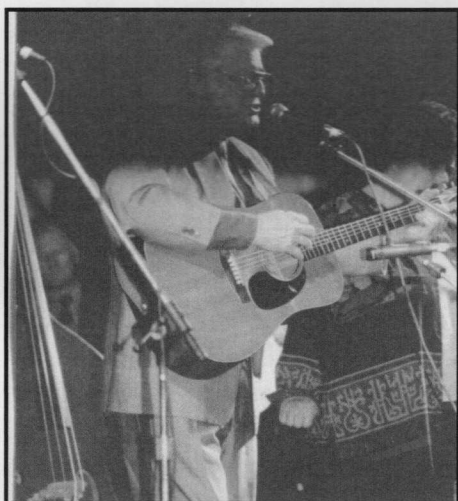
CKNX Barn Dance Band (1940's)
L to R – Lloyd Bank, Lucky Ambeault, Ward Allen, Mel Lavigne, Bill Mankiss. Standing in the back, Jack Kingston.



Gerald Davidson, of the Country Versatiles, onstage at a Barn Dance Show.



Fiddler, Mel Lavigne with his wife May, when he was the very first winner of the first Old Time Fiddle Championship (1951-'52) in Shelburne, Ont.



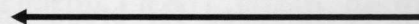
Country singer and Barn Dance Historical Society board member, Wayne Otterbein & wife Judy, performing at the Barn Dance.



Polka King, Walter Ostanek, (middle) pictured here with Barn Dance singer, Earl Heywood, and fiddler, Mel Lavigne, while they were visiting CKCO TV's 'Polka



Fiddler, Al Cherny, hamming it up for a CKNX TV performance in the 1950's.



Country crooner, Randy Satchell, performing at an early Barn Dance Show.





Country Calendar

by Doreen Brown
(Toronto and surrounding area)

Country Calendar updates have been postponed. May everyone stay healthy!

Country Cheers,

Doreen Brown

THE BARN DANCE MUSEUM

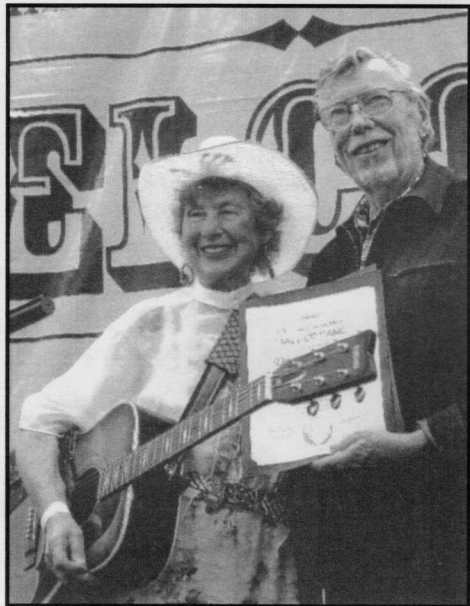
The Barn Dance Museum at 273 Josephine St. Wingham, is **temporarily closed** until further notice. Sorry for the inconvenience.

2021 LONDON MUSIC AWARD WINNER EARL

by Grant Heywood

It was with great pride that my wife (Jeanette) and I were in London recently to accept the 2021 London Music Award, for my Dad, Canada's No. 1 Singing Cowboy, Earl Heywood. I received a call from Rena O'Halloran of London, back in the spring about the 2021 recipients of the London Music Awards. I was delighted that my Dad, Earl Heywood, was going to be one of the honourees this year. Dad was originally from Exeter, but grew up and worked in London. Like our very own Barn Dance Museum, they have displayed my Dad's stage outfit on a mannequin, and placed pictures, albums, and memorabilia in a showcase alongside Dad's cousin, Gordie Tapp and award winning singer, Marie Bottrell. I know my Dad would be proud of this if he were alive.

The Forest City London Music Hall of Fame Museum is just adjacent to the London Music Hall, in downtown London at 182 Dundas Street. I must say that Rena and her colleagues have worked hard and done a wonderful job of refurbishing the old Nash Jewellers store where the museum is located. There are a lot of popular celebrities, artists, musicians, and entertainers, being honoured at the museum. They will also be scheduling live events as well in the near future. From Guy Lombardo to Tommy Hunter, the museum has a lot to offer. It is definitely worth checking out if you get a chance. Go to fclma.ca for more info.



Doreen Brown, seen here with the late Bob Everhart, receiving her National Traditional Country Music Award, at a ceremony in Anita, Iowa. Bob Everhart founded the National Traditional Country & Bluegrass Association. He was a singer/songwriter as well, and passed away Aug. 20/2021 at the age of 85.



Ernie King

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BARN DANCE CORNER

by Peter Saros

Country Universe is a commendable country music blog for a number of reasons. First and foremost, however, is the quality of the content.

Kevin John Coyne, a professional educator who earned his Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy and a Master of Science in Education, founded *Country Universe* in 2004. It is independently owned and operated.

Based upon the comments section, the album reviews, single reviews, and features seem to garner the most interest from the readership.

Most recently, the blog ambitiously ran a feature titled "A Country Music Conversation: Sirius Top 1000 Country Songs of All Time."

This past May, Sirius XM Radio ranked the 1000 Greatest Country Songs of All Time.

In addition to Coyne, *Country Universe* contributors Zachary Kephart and *Country Universe* staff writer Jonathan Keefe responded to the entire 1000 song list in detail. They provided insightful, witty, and personal commentary on each entry. To make for easy digestion, each writer assigned one of the five following ratings to each track

- **TOO HIGH:** A worthy entry to the list, but is ranked too high in relation to its worth
- **ABOUT RIGHT:** A worthy entry to the list, and is ranked about right in relation to its worth
- **TOO LOW:** A worthy entry to the list, but is ranked too low in relation to its worth
- **SO WRONG (THIS SONG):** An entry that has no place on this list but could be replaced by a worthy song from the same artist
- **SO WRONG (DOESN'T BELONG):** An entry that has no place on this list and cannot be replaced by a better entry from the same artist

Concurrently, Coyne launched a retrospective feature re-visiting every #1 single from the nineties as reported by both *Billboard* and *Radio & Records*. Each entry provides a brief history of the artist and the song.

The posts offer an exciting and succinct snapshot from an important period of country music history.

In the spirit of full disclosure, I frequently comment on each entry.

How couldn't I? The 90's country

music boom exploded when I was in high school at Robbinsdale Neil A. Armstrong Senior High School in Plymouth, Minnesota. It was such a privilege to have so many of the stars from this era first rise when I was in my formative musical identity years.

These emergent hat acts quickly became legends and icons. Artists who first hit the charts in the nineties include: Garth Brooks, Clint Black, Joe Diffie, Mark Chesnutt, Trisha Yearwood, Wynonna, Vince Gill, Diamond Rio, Travis Tritt, and Hal Ketchum to name just a few.

I recommend visiting this site. You will find wonderful shares and thoughtful writing.

Just as I offered up YouTuber Grady Smith to the readership of this journal in the 2020 summer edition, I similarly invite the curious readers of this column to check out *Country Universe*.

It would be a joy to see some Barn Dance personalities in the comments section of this feature.

The show must go on...

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