



THE BARN DANCE OPERA JOURNAL

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A TRIBUTE TO MARION MARTHA AMELIA HEYWOOD

by Grant Heywood



Martha Heywood

It was with heavy hearts when our Mom, Martha Heywood, passed away last October, 2021, age 97. I can't thank my sister Pat enough for all the times she spent looking in, and taking care of her at Pinecrest Nursing Home in Lucknow. All the caregivers there also deserve a lot of praise as well.

Mom's maiden name was Marion Martha Amelia Thiel. She was the youngest of two sisters, and one brother, from humble beginnings. Her parents, Olivia and William Thiel, lived in Zurich, Ontario. Dad, Earl Heywood, lived nearby, on a farm just outside of Exeter, Ont.. Mom became a telephone operator and one day Dad asked her to go on a date after hearing her lovely voice over the phone. And so it began, Earl was working on the farm and promoting his cowboy singing/recording career, and soon married Martha. They moved to Wingham, Ont., where Earl had been hired by Doc Cruickshank to be a singing star on the CKNX live Barn Dance shows and radio programs.

They soon had baby Patricia, and

lived in a small 3 room cottage for awhile and not long after Grant was born. Earl's career was blossoming, as he had signed with RCA Victor Records, and had many single recordings. He even had an Earl Heywood Week in his honour and performed with many Nashville luminaries in the U.S. The family soon moved to a duplex on Minnie St., in Wingham. Earl then became a staff writer at CKNX radio and had several television and radio shows there as well. Money was tight in those days and to make ends meet, Martha became an award winning AVON sales lady. She eventually became a Fuller Brush salesperson and also did well at that. It wasn't always easy raising two children, and Dad always performing in the band throughout the week. Money was tight and Mom somehow made it work.

When I was about 6 yrs. old, Mom & Dad took me to see Dad's friend, Gene Autry, at the CNE Grandstand show in Toronto. The Three Stooges were also on the show (circa 1957). Dad had arranged for us to meet Gene Autry, but I really wanted to meet the Three Stooges.

When Mom & Dad performed onstage, Martha was a star in her own right. She was a beautiful lead & harmony singer and sang and recorded with Earl onstage and in the studio. When the Heywood Family became a performing, recording, & touring family, things really took off. I can remember when the family would perform a live Christmas radio show at CKNX studios on the Main Street of Wingham. We soon recorded 3 or 4 Heywood Family albums and toured and performed around Ontario and the Maritimes. Martha would perform a Gay Nineties act with Earl, sing gospel songs, country standards and many of Earl's songs. She was the backbone of the family and always stood by Earl. She helped in the performance on many of Earl's magic shows as well, doing disappearing

acts, being levitated, etc. Dad did rope tricks and practiced in our driveway. One day he was snapping his bullwhip at Mom, trying to whip the unlit cigarette from between her lips. The neighbours soon became concerned about what exactly was going on at the Heywood house. Lol

But most of all, Martha was a great mom. She was an excellent cook, and I always loved her cooking & baking... well maybe except for beets. She always took pride in her family, and was a self taught, but very professional seamstress. She could've had a career making custom clothing. Martha made all of the fancy stage clothes that her and Earl wore onstage. She eventually kept the whole family outfitted in very stylish stage wear. She enjoyed shopping for the latest material and had a knack for finding something special. Mom also made all my stage clothes when I was playing rock and roll for many years. Both Mom & Dad believed if you were going to be an entertainer, then you should look like one onstage....and off.

Mom was the one that taught me how to drive. I remember her taking me out on back gravel roads in a 1962 Volkswagen Beetle manual shift. One day I was driving and switching gears when the whole shift assembly came right out of the transmission. She gasped in her usual 'Oooh' but we somehow made it back to town. She always made sure we went to Sunday school, likely from her Lutheran upbringing. And she loved when Dad would take the whole family for a treat to the Nan King restaurant in Toronto's Chinatown. We would always visit our grandparents almost every 2nd week, in Exeter and Zurich.

It was Mom who would come out to hockey games and practices early in the morning when I played hockey. She wasn't even a hockey fan. Dad couldn't come as he was tired from performing

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The Editor Speaks

by Grant Heywood

As Bob Dylan once said, 'The Times They Are A Changing.' No words ring truer than the changing world we live in today. The COVID Pandemic is still with us, climate change is a very real threat, people have had their lives disrupted, going to work, or school is a sometime thing, friends are unable to gather, inflation is high, and nothing is as it was. Yikes! Sounds like a script for a science fiction movie.

But it is not all doom and gloom. It may not seem like it now, but I believe we've turned a corner, and by late spring or mid summer we should start seeing our lives returning to some kind of normal. Being a musician, I look forward to when that happens with great expectation.

I'm sure everyone has done a lot of soul searching and contemplating with all the time on their hands in isolation. Living in the country sure has its benefits, and I have to admit that it's nice to be able to go for walks in the woods, or play with the dog in a huge yard without feeling confined. For almost 2 years now, I start my day with a coffee and breakfast as I scan the latest news on my iPad. Often, I will take the dog out for playtime. I try to organize what needs to be repaired around the house, and continue with some of the home renovations. Going to the grocery store has been like going on a mini vacation at times.

Often times I'll watch a hockey game on TV, or catch up with what's happening on the long running Coronation Street soap opera from the UK. Hauling wood and keeping the woodstove burning is a chore I now leave to my one son-in-law. He actually likes doing it. My other son-in-law also helps out by shoveling snow from the

snowfall from the night before. Yup. It sure seems like I'm officially retired now. But it sure is handy having them around to keep me from complaining about all my aches and pains.

As a musician, I've always been a bit of a night owl, and this has given me the opportunity for songwriting. I have been a songwriter since I was about 13 years old. I made a commitment to myself when this pandemic began, that I would spend my time wisely by trying to be a better songwriter. Working late at night has been my best time for songwriting as it's a good time for me to gather my thoughts and express myself lyrically, and musically, since it's so quiet with everyone else in bed. No distractions. I truly love writing songs and find inspiration from friends, daily life, past experiences, observation, emotions etc. I've had the experience of writing songs on Nashville's Music Row with Dicky Lee (he wrote She Thinks I Still Care) for George Jones, along with many other hits.

I wrote, and sang many of the songs on the 2nd Major Hooples album, and garnered a Top 10 hit in Canada. I also wrote several of the songs on the Desert Dolphins album which I also had a hit with the song, Dynamite. I write country songs, R & B, blues, rock, jazz, folk, and roots music. I really do love it all. It helps me in appreciating all that music has to offer. Currently, I am working with a blues/rock band from Stratford, even co-writing some of the songs for an upcoming album. I'm already working on my first solo album that will include most of my own songs, and many will be quite different from what some might expect.

I hope I get to finish the album this year and maybe get back to playing live music when I can perform many of them live. I play in about 4 or 5 bands, but really miss my companions in the Barn Dance Band. It has been way too long since our last performance. I know many of them are waiting with anticipation to get back on that Barn Dance stage. I'm sure the audience is equally waiting with anticipation for that to

happen too. Looking forward to seeing many of our Barn Dance friends, after a very long wait, at our first Barn Dance show. Let's hope that happens in 2022. Happy New Year to everyone.

Comments? Please contact:

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2022 COMING EVENTS

| Date | Event Name | Place |
|----------------|-----------------------------|---|
| Sun., May 1 | Barn Dance Show - 2:00 p.m. | Purple Hill Country Hall Thorndale |
| Sat., Sept. 17 | Barn Dance Show | Elma-Logan Arena, Monkton |
| Date unknown | Final Campout Jamboree | Blyth Arena and Campgrounds - Blyth, ON |

Continued on Page 1

with the band the night before. The Heywood family soon moved to their first home on Cornyn St., in Wingham. It was a great location overlooking the Maitland River floodplain, and not far from CKNX studios. Mom was always the gracious host when we had Nashville celebrities visit our house for a social evening. Many well known stars of the time would visit our house when on tour. Her cooking was always a hit with everyone.

Mom always enjoyed entertaining with Dad, and was just as much a star as he was. I know Dad didn't always recognize this, but she helped his career in tough times by being an equal part of the many shows onstage. Mom loved traveling and we were lucky to go many places, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, California, Western & Eastern Canada. Mom & Dad always took us on a car trip, likely because Dad was away often playing dances or concerts. We almost always went camping because we couldn't afford to stay in hotels. I remember when we went for a family trip to Manitoulin Island in the 1956 Plymouth Savoy. My sister got a bee sting and then I got my finger slammed by the car door when my sister closed it. Boy, was Dad mad. He wanted to go back home. But the composure of our Mom saved the day, and the trip. She had obviously dealt with Dad's stubborn anger before. But those were really fun times.

When the Heywood Family toured the Maritimes, we would stay at friend's homes. We would do a TV show one night, play a large auditorium with travelling Nashville stars the next, and then small community centres in small places like Sambro and Musquidobit. Back in Ontario we often frequented one of my favourite spots, Formosa Spring Gardens. Sunday afternoon concerts there were magical as a kid. Mom & Dad always enjoyed playing Fall Fairs, festivals, even Strawberry Socials. As a kid, I did too. Always yummy food. When Dad passed away Mom and I reminisced about the many tours we did as The Heywood Family in the Maritimes. Mom told me that Dad, Hank Snow, & Wilf Carter were good friends, and all were on the RCA label. She told me that our last tour of the Maritimes came about when Wilf Carter asked Dad if we could do his tour of the Maritimes. Wilf also had a family band and couldn't go because he needed a minor operation. He said he'd continue his tour if we could do the eastern portion. I had never known that.

My older sister Pat, was the first to

leave the family band, and soon went to hairdressing school. Mom and Dad helped establish my sister Pat's first hairdressing salon in Wingham, which did very well. I started my first rock and roll band at that time. Mom took up playing piano alongside Dad on guitar in the 1960's. She was not a big fan of performing in drinking establishments and was glad when they eventually stopped. If there was one thing that Mom & Dad taught us, it was not to think you are better than anyone else. Dad bought Mom a modest fur coat one time, and she rarely wore it out in public, because she didn't want to look like she was high class. Nothing could be further from the truth. We certainly weren't rich by any means.

I can remember the day a stranger knocked on our front door and Mom answered. The gentleman introduced himself as Tom Connors, and said he was looking for Earl. He had just arrived from the Maritimes and wanted to discuss how to proceed making contacts in the music business with Dad. Mom didn't let him in as she had never seen him before. Tom told Mom he was staying at the Queen's Hotel in Wingham and said Dad could find him there. Stompin' Tom Connors became friends with Dad and they also recorded at the RCA studios in Toronto using the same producer. Small world.

Besides family, Mom loved getting together and visiting with everyone on both sides of the family. Because of being entertainers, both Mom & Dad enjoyed socializing. Dad was in the midst of having a revived career with the success of his Tales of the Donnelly Feud album. Mom & Dad became a duo performing many of the songs at fairs and theatres. Mom became quite upset when two special agents from the RCMP showed up at our door. They wanted to know about Dad performing at the Exeter Fair grandstand show, and if he had associated with any Irish people related to the IRA. Dad had been told not to perform any Donnelly songs at his show the day before. He slipped in a verse and chorus at the show because of audience demand, even though he was told by authorities not to sing Donnelly songs, especially since there might've been IRA infiltrators at the scene. The Donnelly incident was still a sore spot locally. That's why the RCMP were interested.

Being with the grandkids was always special for Mom & Dad and they always took the time to be with them. They eventually moved to a smaller house in

Wingham. Mom would help out with the local Meals On Wheels program. Dad had a CKNX country music radio show for a while and both Mom & Dad continued as special guests at various events playing and singing on TV, at theatres and even church events.

Both Mom & Dad helped renovate our home near Wellesley, drywalling, painting, stonework, landscaping, and baby sitting. In the early 1990's, Mom & Dad started selling quilts made by the Women's Auxiliary in Wingham, to help kick start a Barn Dance Museum in Wingham. Soon, the Barn Dance Historical Society was born and Barn Dance Shows began raising money to help finance the Barn Dance Museum. As Honorary President, Earl began the Pioneer Award program honouring those performers who had been a part of the original Barn Dance and those who continued to help in the resurrected Barn Dance. Mom and Dad were in their twilight years. It was a monumental task for them in re-establishing the Barn Dance, and the Barn Dance Museum, but gratifying having others in Wingham, to help establish the Barn Dance Historical Society. They were grateful and inspired to have others come on board to help realize their vision.

Dad was one of the original 7 who started the CCMA in Canada. He was also one of the first to receive a CCMA award. Although Mom, Martha Heywood, shared in all of Dad's accolades she was just as much of an award winner to both me and my sister Pat. Our Mom endured hardships and happy times, but never complained. She was always pleasant, kind, loving, and everything you could ever want in a great mom. She missed Dad when he passed on but gained a new independence for herself. - At Blyth Barn Dance shows, she always enjoyed being singled out by MC, Jim Swan, standing proudly to do the 'Queen wave' to the audience.

Our mother, Martha, will always be in our hearts. She died peacefully and was laid to rest next to Earl in the Wingham cemetery. She is so deserving of the title The Matriarch of the Barn Dance. My sister and our families think of her everyday. When you are young, you think you Mom will last forever. Mom was a proud, gracious lady, and the best Mom you could ask for, so dearly missed by family & friends. Oh how she would've enjoyed holding her new great grandson little Charlie. Love you always Mom.

I'M CONFUSED

(opinion column) by Grant Heywood

While I was collecting info. on country music celebrities who passed away in 2021, I searched online multiple times to try and find Canadian country musicians who passed away. I came up with absolutely nothing. I know of one local Cdn. country entertainer, Joe Firth, who passed away this year, but nothing else. I'm doubtful it's because none died. Likely it's because they weren't big enough stars in Canada to warrant a mention.

It's sad that Canadian country music, especially the CCMA, has to grovel at the feet of Nashville to make headlines. I'm not angry with Nashville, as that's the American way to promote their artists worldwide. I'm ticked off at our Canadian media and country music organizations for their lack of respect by not listing those country artists who pioneered the music genre in Canada. We have many country music artists in Canada that deserve better.

Many talented Canadian country artists make the trek to Nashville to follow their dream, and that's only natural if you want to become an international star. Canada doesn't have the huge population to become a massive success like the U.S. I'm happy that we have some great new Canadian country talent like Dean Brody, The Reklaws, Tenille Townes, Brett Kissel, and Washboard Union, to name a few. I know it takes talent and especially a ton of \$\$\$ to even make it to the CCMA awards. But my beef is with the CCMA in general.

In my opinion, the CCMA awards show is just a pale imitation of the big Nashville machine. They should quit trying to be something they're not. I remember the huge outcry when the CCMA's were going to discontinue the

Steel guitarist award. I haven't even been able to find a listing of famous Canadian country artists who have died online, anywhere! I guess past accomplishments in country music in Canada just aren't newsworthy or warrant some kind of honorary webpage.

The Barn Dance Historical Society has been struggling with some of these same issues locally. Before COVID began, many country musicians grumbled about the same thing. That may also have to do with the state of country music in general here in Canada. Old time country, unfortunately, has a shelf life and I believe that it is slowly eroding. I love old country music and grew up with it. Cdn. country singer/recording artist, Paul Weber, said it best when he noticed the decline in patrons at his famous Commercial Tavern in Maryhill. Paul said, "It's not like it used to be, and I hate to say the music we love so much, is a dying breed." Every once in a while a big name country artist will record an album of country classics, and people think it's coming back. We wish it was... but sadly it's not, especially on mainstream radio.

That's okay, as there are still Barn Dance shows, Purple Hill shows, some dances, country festivals, and select radio stations where we can still get our fix of classic, old country music. But as the demographic ages, so does the music. It happened with big band music, cowboy music, and old doo wop rock & roll. Nothing lasts forever. But it would sure be nice to see the country music industry in Canada at least show some respect for those that paved the way, whether they made a big or small contribution. Have a heart. It's the least they deserve.

BARN DANCE SOUVENIRS

| | |
|---|-------------|
| Souvenir Mugs - | \$ 5.00 ea. |
| CD - Vol. 1 | \$15.00 ea. |
| CD - Vol. 2 | \$15.00 ea. |
| CD - Vol. 3 | \$15.00 ea. |
| CD - Vol. 1, 2 & 3 | \$40.00 set |
| Cassette - Vol. 1 | \$ 6.00 ea. |
| Cassette - Vol. 2 | \$ 6.00 ea. |
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| Sizes S, M, L, XL, XXL | \$20.00 ea. |
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AMERICAN COUNTRY MUSIC ARTISTS WE LOST IN 2021

by *Grant Heywood*

- ♫ Jan. 1 - Misty Morgan - 75, singing duo with Jack Blanchard
- ♫ Jan. 8 - Ed Bruce - 81, singer/songwriter, "Mama's Don't Let Your Babys....."
- ♫ Jan. 18 - Jimmie Rodgers - 87 - singer/songwriter, "Honeycomb"
- ♫ Apr. 14 - Rusty Young - 75, Leader/steel gtr./ singer songwriter for Poco
- ♫ Apr. 23 - Charlie Black - 71, songwriter, "Come Next Monday"
- ♫ May 29 - B.J. Thomas - 75, singer, "Raindrops Keep Falling On My Head"
- ♫ July 10 - Byron Berline - 77, World champion fiddler
- ♫ Aug. 13 - Nancy Griffith - 68, singer/songwriter "Love at the 5 & Dime"
- ♫ Aug. 20 - Tom T Hall - 85, famous storyteller, singer/songwriter
- ♫ Aug. 21 - Don Everly - 84, one half of the Everly Brothers
- ♫ Aug. 26 - Kenny Malone - 83, well known Nashville session drummer
- ♫ Sept. 22 - Bob Moore - 88, double bassist for Patsy Cline, Elvis, & others
- ♫ Sept. 26 - Commander Cody - 77, "Hot Rod Lincoln"
- ♫ Oct. 22 - Jay Black - 82,- singer for Jay & the Americans
- ♫ Oct. 24 - Sonny Osborne - 83, Banjo for the Osborne Bros. "Rocky Top"
- ♫ Dec. 4 - Stonewall Jackson - 89, Classic country singer; "Waterloo"
- ♫ Dec. 24 - J D Crowe - 84, Famous bluegrass banjo icon



Martha and Earl celebrating their anniversary, 1994.

JOE FIRTH

Joe Firth, country singer. - 81, passed away Nov. 9th, 2021. Predeceased by his wife, Bonnie (2006). Father to Jeff & Shelly and their spouses, plus 'Poppa' to several grandchildren & great grandkids.

Joe was a renowned country music artist, touring worldwide with his band, Joe Firth and The Promised Land. The band included several musicians, including Mike & Paul Weber, as well Al Widmeyer. The band toured across Canada consistently.

Joe recorded many records in Nashville and was featured on the Tommy Hunter TV Show. His North American Talent Agency promoted many up & coming country artists. Later, in his retirement years, Joe would frequent the Commercial Tavern in Maryhill to enjoy Paul Weber & the band. Joe will be missed by family, friends, and fans.

THE BARN DANCE MUSEUM

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



The Heywood Family at home in Wingham for a photo shoot for their next album.

HEYWOOD FAMILY MEMORIES



Daughter Patricia, and Martha enjoying the Blyth Barn Dance Campout Jamboree, 2012.



At the Wingham Legion celebrating Martha & Earl's 45th wedding anniversary. L.to R—Martha, Grant, Patricia, & Earl, dancing together.



Earl and Martha onstage performance at the Blyth Barn Dance Campout Jamboree. Exquisite stage clothes courtesy of Martha Heywood.



Picture of the 2nd Heywood Family album. L to R - Patricia, Martha, Earl, and Grant out front. The Heywood Family were known as Canada's First Family of Song, with Earl Heywood as Canada's #1 Singing Cowboy & featuring Grant Heywood, as Canada's first youngest recording artist at that time. (Circa 1958)



An early picture of Martha at her home in Zurich. Going to work as a Bell Telephone operator.



Martha Heywood, at the International Plowing Match promoting the Barn Dance Museum by raffling tickets for a quilt draw.



With the grandkids. L to R - Martha, Kathy Cook, Jennifer Cook, Earl, and babies, Kianna & Janessa Heywood.



Country Calendar

by Doreen Brown
(Toronto and
surrounding area)

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

Country Cheers,
Doreen Brown



Earl Heywood sits in front of his country cowboy wardrobe, all hand made by his wife Martha. It's what the well dressed cowboy should wear.

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.
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or call 519-530-8000
E-mail:
webmaster@thebardance.ca

To All of Our Jamboree/Campout Participants:

Once again, we regret to announce that we will be unable to host our Annual Jamboree/Campout in Blyth for 2022. Due to restrictions placed upon us by COVID 19 and in the interest of our health and safety, it is in our best interest not to gather in large numbers. No future Jamboree/Campouts are planned at this point in time.

Please continue to monitor our website at www.thebardance.ca for possible shows in 2022.

We Thank You for your patience and understanding.

R. Baxter

Ruth Baxter
President

"CANADA'S LARGEST TRAVELLING BARN DANCE"

BARN DANCE CORNER

by Peter Saros

Gerry Bowler's charming 2005 biography of Santa Claus includes a chapter titled "Santa in the Movies (and in the Jukebox Too." In it, the author, writes, "There are tears a-plenty when country-and-western singers reach for the Santa hankies... [while] other country songs take a less melancholy approach to Santa."

One of the songs mentioned by name in that latter category is "Rootin' Tootin' Santa Claus" by Pee Wee King and The Golden West Cowboys, a trailblazing band that combined western swing, cowboy songs, and pop music.

Listening to the smooth vocals of Henry "Redd" Stewart's 1949 rustic take on Jolly Old St. Nick today not only highlights just how pretty and tight that particular seasonal song was back then, but how professionally and precisely executed King's entire output remains.

King's work comes roughly from the same era as Hank Williams, Bill Monroe, and Bob Wills, but he is never mentioned in the same breath as those icons of country music. What a shame that we have seemingly tried to ruin his name through

that sin of omission because King, born Frank Kuczynski on the south-side of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, was a true pioneer.

It is stunning to review all the "firsts" in country music associated with Pee Wee King.

Country historian Charles Wolfe maintains that the biggest contribution King made to country music was his sense of both professionalism and style. King's outfit made a full-time living in the music business without a side hustle.

Wolfe attributes King's outfit with showing the Grand Ole Opry with, "...how to use "play-on music" to introduce an act and "chasers" to accompany an artist as he left the stage. Common enough today in every live country show, these techniques were innovations in 1937."

King brought cowboy music from the silver screen and radio to the Opry stage. The Golden West Cowboys dressed like the movie stars that inspired them as well. "Dressed to kill," said Wolfe, in outfits designed by Hollywood tailor Nudie Cohen.

King always maintained The Golden West Cowboys were the first entertainers in Nashville to join the musicians local union. He was one of the first Opry regulars to use an electric steel guitar onstage. He was also the first to use drums on stage although George D. Hay insisted the instrument not be named on air.

When Franklin Delano Roosevelt died in 1945, King's horn man played taps on his trumpet, another Opry first.

Eddy Arnold and Cowboy Copas got their starts as vocalists for King's band.

King wrote "Tennessee Waltz" in 1948 which went on to become Tennessee's state song.

His song "Slow Poke" was one of the first country music songs to successfully cross-over to the pop charts in 1951.

King was also a pioneer in country music television, at one point being involved with regional and national shows in four different markets. He also acted in several motion picture shows.

King was inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame in 1974. He died in March 2020.

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