

# BILL & SUE-ON HILLMAN: A 50-YEAR MUSICAL ODYSSEY



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Presents  
**Stage 5**

## A Prairie Saga in Song

Words and Music by Bill Hillman

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We have written and recorded about 50 original songs and many of them have been somewhat autobiographical in nature. Our most concerted effort in this direction came with the recording of our PRAIRIE SAGA concept album. It opened with a tribute to the various North American Indian tribes and went on to a song inspired by my grandparents who settled on our homeplace in 1878. The album continued with the fond memories I have of growing up in a prairie farm community and my love for this part of the world.

The saga of this +50-year-long journey really comes alive though, with the arrival of my partner in life and love and the memories of our performing years and music tours together. All of this is segued with our devotion to family and our various "day job" careers. I've included an introduction to each set of lyrics as well as links to the actual recordings.

We dedicate this "Saga" to our three kids -- Ja-On, Robin and China-Li -- who were with us for much of this long journey -- but I'm sure many of the experiences that unravel here will perhaps provide them with a deeper insight into what makes "the old folks" tick.



### MASSACRE



Both Sue-On and I are high school teachers of geography and English. One reason for the creation of *Massacre* was to show students how native Indian place names have enriched our North American landscape. In addition to serving as a tribute to those who came here generations before my ancestors, I felt that the writing and recording of a song using colourful Indian names was an excellent way to enhance my teaching. As you can hear in the lyrics, I tried string together the fascinating names of Indian tribes in a lyrical and rhythmic way.

We enjoy doing this song on stage - and I guess the performances which stand out most in our memory where the times we sang it in the back-to-nature setting of the Boggy Creek Call of the Wild Country and Bluegrass Festival. We were quite involved in the event for many years, both as performers and organizers.

Our appreciation of Canadian aboriginal heritage was further enhanced during my four-month teaching assignment in Northern Manitoba on the Pukatawagan First Nations Reserve. I was teaching university courses on a Brandon University satellite campus. The University regularly

flew me to Puk and back. Following this I was assigned an permanent office on the BU campus, but my northern adventure was an unforgettable experience.



## MASSACRE

Granddaddy told of times  
He saw men dying  
Old women weeping,  
Naked children crying  
Blankets, trinkets  
For land and gold  
Ain't nothing left  
But memories to hold...  
For the...

### Chorus

Chickasaw Waccamaw Iroquois Sioux  
Susquehanna Missisauga and the Kickapoo  
Choctaw Chippewa Yakima Cree  
Sissipahaw Wichita and brave Pawnee

Then we chopped down the trees  
And poisoned the breeze  
Killed all the beasts and  
Brought nature to her knees  
Now rivers are dying  
Too heavy to flow  
Proud people crying,  
Nowhere to go...  
For the...

Cherokee Apache Mohave Mandan  
Shawnee Comanche Miami Cheyenne  
Apalache Muskogee Tutchone Navajo  
Missouri Shoshone and proud Arapaho



## PUKATAWAGAN BLUES



A few years ago, one of my job assignments as a professor at Brandon University was to spend four months teaching computers and journalism in the BU classroom at Pukatawagan -- a remote First Nations community in northern Manitoba. There is not much entertainment in Puk in the middle of winter, but I had my guitar with me. There is something about the isolation of Puk that lends itself to singin' the blues. *Pukatawalkin' Blues* is the result of that experience.

My next-door neighbour, Sidney Castel, was a sort of local celebrity. NCI Network Radio played his single, *The Pukatawagan Song*, in constant rotation. I was spending much of my time researching Puk history and scanning vintage photographs of Indian life in the North. Most of the photos were brought in by students from their personal collections. To add a bit of colour to this project I invited Sidney to my class to relate his life experiences in the North and to answered questions about his stage and recording experiences as a native performer.

The session ended in a "guitar pull" singing session where I performed my Puk Blues in answer to Sydney's Puk Song. He related his string of misfortunes concerning guitars. His wife, in a

jealous tiff, had kabonged him over the head with his first instrument when she thought he was paying too much attention to some of the ladies during one of his bar performances. His second guitar had been stolen. Sadly, Sidney died a year later, but I'm sure that the memories of this event touched everyone involved.

I joined the local band for a few social events and when my 30 adult students learned I was doing a show with Bobby Curtola after I returned to the Southland they started to raise funds to pay for their trip down for the show.



## PUKATAWALKIN' BLUES

Travellin' Professor is what they call me now  
Travellin' Professor means you're never sittin' down

### CHORUS

I keep a walking... Walkin' to the Northern Store  
I got the Pukatawalkin Pukatawalkin Blues

My luggage flew to Churchill - no socks for my feet  
My grub's up with the polar bears and I'm getting awful weak

Hey, Hey buddy - Tell me where's the store  
Ya justa keepa sloggin' - Only five miles or more

Waitin' for the phone man - Bout a month or more  
Says I'd like to help you - But I been that way before

Winter roads are scary - Ice is breakin' up at Puk  
Roll your windows down - You'll catch some fish with any luck

Water lines all froze up - Not a drop for tea  
Doin' my flushin' and my washin' - Down by the Missinippi

My neighbours all got TV - I got NCI  
Neighbours cook with microwaves - I'm eatin' old cold pie

Walkin' to the airport - The plane won't go  
Man sez don't ya know - It's 44 below



## JOHN CAMPBELL - PIONEER



My great grandfather came west in 1878 with his family and possessions to homestead a tract of land south of the Little Saskatchewan River Bend settlement -- near the present location of Strathclair. I was raised on this farm and we still maintain a home on this homestead site. This song was written as a tribute to those early pioneers. Besides trying to express our love for this area where my ancestors sank roots so long ago, I was also trying to show how much I feel we owe to our heritage.

The family and local history research that inspired this song served me well a few years later. I've had a long association with Brandon University -- going back to 1961 and in more recent times to work on staff as an Assistant Professor. I was commissioned by the Geography Department to contribute a chapter to a university textbook. I expanded many of the themes in "John Campbell - Pioneer" and "Memory Take Me Back" in the writing of my chapter. The result

was:

THE GEOGRAPHY OF MANITOBA: ITS LAND AND ITS PEOPLE  
Strathclair: A Prairie Town with a Past, Present & Future  
EVOLUTION OF THE STRATHCLAIR DISTRICT  
William G. Hillman, B.Sc.(Hons), B.Ed., M.Ed.  
Assistant Professor ~ Brandon University, Brandon, MB Canada

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### JOHN CAMPBELL - PIONEER

Westward bound the year was '78  
John Campbell - Pioneer  
Steamin' by train and rolling by wagon  
To Manitoba's wild frontier  
His daddy built a house of sod just for the winter  
Come summer built a house of stone  
Cleared the virgin land and they did it by hand  
Workin' aching fingers to the bone

He met my Nanny in a country school house  
Where they danced the night away  
Bought a gold band and asked for the hand  
Of pretty little Katy McKay  
Green Bluff girl then moved into Maple Grove  
Just a little south of town  
Helping in the fields and cooking all the meals  
And watching little babies run around

#### Chorus

Now I walk the same fields and the forests  
But it's not as it once used to be  
And I realize with tears in my eyes  
Time fades their memory

'20s brought good times, '30s took them back  
'40s called the second son away  
Winter '55 took and old man's life  
And a woman's will to live another day  
But the house still stands to the memory of a man  
Who settled on this prairie land  
Trees a-blowing in the wind are still growing  
Planted by a woman's loving hand



## MEMORY TAKE ME BACK



The glory years of Strathclair and many other similar prairie communities reached their zenith in mid-twentieth century -- the '50s decade. The excitement and spirit generated by these towns was perhaps best epitomized by the Saturday Night "event." Following the Saturday evening supper hour, families would prepare to "go to town."

The first cars to arrive would get the best seats. This meant finding a diagonal parking spot along the north side of main street (North Railway Street) in the well-lit, high-traffic area extending from the pool room at Minnedosa Street to the modern 'self-serve' department store at Campbell Street. Between these termini, people of all ages walked a jostling gauntlet along a strip of thriving businesses.

Three favourite spots were the drugstore with its soda fountain and magazine rack, the Chinese cafe, with its booths for socializing, and a rival eatery which featured a jukebox, pinball machine and lunch counter with stools. Many of the men gathered in one of the two male bastions -- the beer parlour and the pool room; while a favourite routine for the women was to peruse the line of parked Fords, Chevies and Dodges -- each vehicle demanding a nod, wave or a detour off the sidewalk for a chat. When the week's discussion lagged out on the street, there seemed to be no end of open doors to shops to provide diversion: bakery, grocery, dry goods store, newspaper office, garages, butcher shop, hardware store, restroom, shoemaker, and tinsmith. In the winter there was always skating, curling and hockey at the rink.

The routine for some, and certainly for myself, was to go to the 7 o'clock movie at the Bend Theatre, delaying the sidewalk promenade for later. From a thirty-five cent allowance, kids could eke out a full night's entertainment which included a movie (complete with newsreel, Three Stooges short, cartoon, serial, previews, and draws for prizes), popcorn, "coke" or popsicle, double bubble gum, jawbreakers, and a fifty-two page or 3-D comic book. Later in the decade, many people gathered outside the electric shop which provided an outdoor speaker connected to the twenty-one inch television in the window, few realizing that this box with its flickering black and white pictures was a harbinger of drastic change to this weekly social phenomemon that everyone took for granted.



### MEMORY TAKE ME BACK

Mother's mother on the porch where she's makin butter  
 Grandfather's out in the yard where he loves to putter  
 Screen door slams -- sister runs in crying  
 Skinned a knee out where the collie dog's lying  
 Memory take me back just one more time

Daddy's in the field where he keeps the prairie dust flying  
 Rain don't come but the clouds keep on trying  
 Though drought and hail made times a lot tougher  
 A mother's love saw that we didn't suffer  
 Memory take me back just one more time

Saturday night Daddy takes us into town for a movie  
 Late night shopping and farm talk swapping on Main Street  
 Old men standing by the pool hall talking  
 Young folks out on the sidewalk walking  
 Memory take me back just one more time



### HARVEST



The lyrics pretty well tell the whole story of this song. We were trying to create, on record, a bitter-sweet feel akin to the moods of Autumn on the prairies -- and our country home: the cool fall breezes, birds migrating to the south, stubble fires, falling leaves, harvest moon, dew turning to frost, shortening days. All of this contrasting with the strangers, loneliness of crowds, and pollution associated with urban living. If we succeeded in this I believe we owe it to Sue-On's wistful interpretation.



### HARVEST

Sun shinin' brightly  
 Cold wind blowin' free

Old mallard's winging  
His way from the north  
Smoky air sweeping  
Through tired leaves weeping  
Prairie life singing  
A song to the north

When the brown city air and  
Cold sidewalk stares get me down  
I reach for the days and  
Old time ways of the farm  
Memories so warm,  
Of the place I was born, I recall  
Harvest time  
And dandelion wine in the fall

Stubblefields burning  
Old windmills turning  
Silhouettes framed by  
The sun's fall to earth  
Dew crystallizing  
Harvest moon rising  
October night singing  
A song to the north



## CHINA LADY



This song was written as sort of a metaphor. It was inspired by memories of the rather difficult time that Sue-On and I had during our three year courtship. One of the obstacles we faced was Sue-On's being sent to live and work with relatives for a year in distant Winnipeg. This attempt to separate us was not successful, but it was often a sad and stressful time for both of us. We were able to marry when Sue-On turned 18 . . . the start of a long and beautiful journey. A true love story.

We have had a long relationship with oriental culture. We have a deep respect for oriental art, music, traditions and martial arts. Our living, recreation, and work areas are all adorned with Chinese art and furnishings, of which the Chinese moon door on the cover of the CD is a good example. This appreciation of 'the East' has carried over into other areas as well. As a family sport and discipline we studied Wado Kai Karate -- a martial arts style developed by Supreme Instructor Masaru Shintani, 8th Dan. Under the instruction of Sensei Bruce Dunning, we have both achieved the rank of 1st Degree Black Belt.

We assembled our regular Canadian cast of characters to record this one at Century 21 Studios - a very up-to-date facility housed in a converted synagogue in Winnipeg's North End. This entourage was made up of musician friends we have worked with for many years: Alan Jones is a physiotherapist, musician and songwriter blinded as a child in wartime England. We encouraged him to try to get some kind of an oriental sound out of the massive Yamaha studio organ. Kevin Pahl is daredevil cropduster and musician extraordinaire who did a fine job at eking a vibes/celeste-like sound out of the Fender Rhodes piano. Barry Forman a champion fiddler, car dealer and former teacher thumped away on bass -- a task he performed so many times on our sessions. Sue-On and I were singing while playing drums and guitar.

Meanwhile, engineer John Smith -- who had worked with the Beatles at Abbey Road and had received a credit on their double White Album -- tried to pull it all together in the control room. Also sitting in at the console for this session was another musician friend -- Kerry Morris -- pilot, hang glider, computer systems analyst - who joined us a few years later as our regular bassist and drummer.



## CHINA LADY

O China Lady  
Though you are far away  
You're haunting me night and day  
With your laughing eyes

O China Lady  
In every dream I see  
A vision of you and me  
Under China skies

When the moon shines  
Through the prairie sky  
And the cold wind wails  
And calls your name  
I'm on some foreign shore  
By the ocean's roar  
Long ago - Far away

O China Lady  
I'm living in misery  
Surrounded by memories  
Of our last goodbye



## CHINA SONG



I wrote *China Song* with considerable help from Sue-On -- if you listen closely it should be easy to pick out her contributions -- I am not exactly fluent in Chinese. From our first meeting I have been constantly amazed at what this person -- my soul mate -- is capable of achieving.

Sue-On was born in southern China, but her family lost everything there during the Communist Revolution. At age two she was smuggled out of China with a neighbour family and lived with her grandmother in Hong Kong until the her mother and siblings were able to follow. Eventually, at age 10, she and her mother were allowed to join her father in a small prairie town in Canada, where he and his father had owned restaurants for many years. She mastered English and adapted to the new culture while working in her family's restaurant.

After we married she joined me in performing on stage -- singing, and playing drums and keyboards. She then completed University (BA, B.Ed) and worked as a high school teacher, as well spending time as a Field Supervisor for the University of Manitoba and Brandon University - - all this while maintaining a frenetic performing schedule and raising three kids. When we took over the long-established Choy family restaurant -- SOO's in Brandon -- she added the role of restaurant manager and entrepreneur to her slate of accomplishments. We sold the restaurant after ten years and Sue-On resumed her role as an educator. This time she worked as an English for Academic Purposes instructor at Brandon University -- teaching international students from all over the world. Not the least of her achievements has been her ability to put up with my idiosyncrasies through all these years.

It is ironic, considering all the trouble Sue-On's family had in getting out of China that, for a while, Beijing became one of our largest radio audiences. Sue-On's brother-in-law, Wai Kai was captured by the authorities after having paid to be smuggled out of the country by boat. It was 17 years before he was able to join his wife and daughter in Canada. After coming to Brandon, he stayed in touch with a friend who had been assigned the job of music programmer for Radio

Beijing. When China relaxed its ban on 'things Western,' there was a great thirst for music from America and some of the first imported tapes they heard were ours -- Choy revenge?



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### CHINA SONG

*(Chinese Lyrics)*

Tears dim my eyes  
Leaves drift to the ground  
Cold winter wind  
Chills to the bone  
Time lingers on  
But love has passed me by  
All I have are dreams  
Of you and home

CHINESE LYRICS .....



### A SAD COUNTRY LOVESONG



This song is sort of a typical lonely bar song, but it is somewhat autobiographical. Sue-On and I had a long courtship and we faced many obstacles that kept us apart for over two years.



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### A SAD COUNTRY LOVESONG

Chorus

Play me a sad country lovesong  
Sing it so sweet and low  
Play me an old fashioned love song  
I've been away for so long

We met in a small prairie dancehall  
We danced till the dawn's early light  
I held her close as we whispered  
The words to each song that night

Now I sit at this bar in the city  
Fame and fortune I've found  
But my thoughts all drift to the homeplace  
A girl -- and a prairie town.



### HIGHWAY 354



For many years we were based in our Maple Grove country home on Highway 354 near Strathclair. I taught high school through the week and we spent the weekends on the road driving to gigs all over Manitoba and into Ontario and Saskatchewan. We had quite an obsession with all things musical: weekend gigs, songwriting, recording, radio/TV, and summer tours which took us all across the prairies and even farther afield to the USA and UK.



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### HIGHWAY 354

Slam the car door



Highway 354  
Gonna take me from a week of 9 to 5  
Love that highway sound  
Lonely Manitoba towns  
Lights and truckers, weekend lovers flying by

Chorus

O I can take it, think I'll make it  
Even though it takes a mighty long time  
O I'll keep shakin' and fakin'  
And rakin' in the dollars and dimes

Gimli Carman Dauphin  
Brandon Shilo Austin  
Then on the road and home to Maple Grove  
McCreary Minnedosa  
Portage Wawanese  
I'll keep makin' records - Looking for gold

Nine to five a day job  
Only in the way job  
Longing for the weekend show  
Nine to five a day job  
Just a slavin' pay job  
Dreaming 'bout another life I know



**MONTANA**

We have spent many summers touring Western USA and Canada -- performing with American acts on grandstands at rodeos and State, Provincial and County Fairs. Many acts were from Nashville, but the ones we found most interesting were the variety acts from California.

Our US booking agents were the Bardines who were veterans of the last days of Vaudeville, so it was not surprising to find a multitude of fascinating, experienced acts on the bill. We rubbed shoulders with, and took show biz lessons from, magicians, ventriloquists, comedy pickpockets, trick cyclists, dancers, standup comics, tenor banjo players, chorus girls, singers, acrobats . . . the gamut.

When we were not listening to inside stories about Greats such as Bob Hope, Ed Sullivan, and the Marx Brothers, we basked in the aura of enthusiasm that surrounded these seasoned entertainers. All of this played out against an almost incongruous backdrop of the 'wild west.' Inexplicably this, coupled with my love for geography and heritage, seemed to pull me back into the traditions of the western setting we were touring - hence this song.

We tried to convey some of the Montana Big Sky feel through some unusual studio effects which included flanging the strings and fading the ending with a lonely wind effect.



**MONTANA**

(Written in Missoula, Montana during our 1974 tour of the NW USA)

Rolling down the highway -- we're southern bound  
Wind from the bus blows the sweet grass 'round  
Kalispell, Missoula and their rodeos  
Play a little fiddle and a dosey doe

Dancing and prancing -- the ponies a-flying  
Cowboys cussing and their ladies a-crying  
Pick a little tune, a jig and a song  
Montana crowd wanna sing along

Chorus

Montana  
Your song goes on  
Echoing through the sky  
Montana  
I'll sing your song  
Till the day I die

Phantoms and shadows on the far horizon  
Stories of the redman and herds of bison  
Railroad, wagon, trader and miner  
Lawman, outlaws, and old moonshiners

Shaken outa my dreams by the tires a-whining  
Just another sound of the Old West dying  
Can't live the past but I'll sing it in song  
Kindle old times as we roll along



## SWAMP ROMP

For many of our years on the road our bass player, Barry, doubled on fiddle. So I wrote a number of songs to feature his electric fiddle which he played through numerous effects such as a wah-wah pedal. This, and our fondness for artists such as CCR and Doug Kershaw, led us to an appreciation of swamp and Cajun music. As a result, some of the songs I wrote were with these themes in mind so as to feature his fiddle.

By the time we recorded this song in England, however, Barry had left the band, so it was adapted with quite a different feel. It does give a nod though, to the great diversity of audiences we have entertained, the many distant places we travelled to, and our ongoing search for distant horizons.

### SWAMP ROMP

*(Written at Island Lake, northern Manitoba and somewhere in the American South)*

We've sung of Alabama -- Louisiana too  
Montana where we paid our dues  
Manitoba gold and Saskatchewan dust  
Sunday in Alberta - yeh we cussed and cussed

We bin up and down  
Round and round  
We keep movin'  
We bin north and south  
Town to town  
We keep a groovin'  
We keep setting our eyes  
On another horizon  
To follow

O we fly to Toronto -- Fly to LA

Hustlin' all night -- And bussin' all day  
Fly to the East -- Fly to the West  
England swings, we think it's the best

Long Hair, Redneck and Leisure Suit  
We love 'em all -- we don't give a hoot  
Hustle, Bump and Boogie and Texas Swing  
Just hum a couple bars and we'll pick that thing



## GOOD-TIME JAMBOREE



This is a novelty song about our stage exploits and the experience of performing many decades worth of one-nighters.

It was recorded during our Newcastle sessions in England. This studio, like so many of the places we played in England, was inaccessible in the extreme. We had to pull our gear up many flights of stairs and through a seemingly endless number of doors because the facility was situated on the upper level of a large bingo hall complex.

After surviving this ordeal which anyone in his right mind would have left to roadies, I returned to re-park our Ford Transit van only to find that the meter maid had decorated it with a parking ticket -- to add infuriation to fatigue.



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## GOOD-TIME JAMBOREE


*(Written in assorted dressing rooms in Middlesbrough, England)*

### Chorus

Come on and give the band a hand on the ole bandstand  
They're singing all night for you  
Guitar's ringing and the drummer girl's singing the blues  
We'll pick a little fiddle and diddle  
with the ivories in harmony  
We'll have a rompin' stompin' good-time jamboree

Forget your tax laws, in-laws, out-laws, too  
Even Grandma's jumpin' like new  
Dancing and prancing -- any ole dude'll do  
Dancing outside, inside, upside-down  
Look -- her feet don't touch the ground  
Struttin', double clutchin', and  
hitching up her gingham gown

The amp'll stapple crackle pop when we start to rock  
You'll feel your toes tapping down in your socks  
Skippin' and trippin' and rocking around the clock  
We'll keep you creepin' and peepin'  
-- anything but sleepin'  
Till the moonshine meets the sun  
Then you'll drag it to your wagon and  
The band's on the run again.



## One Night Stand

This autobiographical effort was written during a rather laid-back and reflective mood. Although we tour far afield most summers, the remainder of each year is spent playing one-nighters. The experiences we have shared while performing in a different town every night has developed bonds with which only musicians can identify. The fact that we are married has seemed to intensify marital bonds as well. Our closest lifelong friends have always been musicians and some of our most cherished moments could only have come about through our performing experiences.

Dovetailing other careers with our music has been the source of some frustration over the years - family and teaching careers have always come first. This has meant that we have not always been able to follow up music opportunities, but the moment we step on stage, any stage, the rush of performing kicks in -- a cure-all for all maladies.

*One Night Stand* was recorded at Impulse Studios at Walls End in Newcastle-On-Tyne, England. The studio is located close to the eastern limit of Hadrian's Wall -- a wall built by the Romans to keep out the wild Scottish tribes. The wall was not too successful in holding back Scots from the studio ... we invaded successfully, as did quite a number of Celtic groups, such as the Chieftains, who used the studio regularly.

These Newcastle Sessions came about at the end of our second tour of Britain and resulted in 14 songs for Album #7. *One Night Stand* was culled as a single and was our first charted song to break the Top 10. We eventually performed it on the CBC network-televised Canada Country Music Week concert at the Winnipeg Centennial Auditorium - backed up with a 20-piece orchestra. Our fondest memories of this event, however, centred around our backstage bull sessions with fellow entertainers George Hamilton IV and The Family Brown, swapping stories about performing in England.



### ONE NIGHT STAND

(Standing Up For Rock 'n' Roll)

(Written on a Western Canada tour of summer exhibitions and rodeos)

Make the same ole rounds  
Hit the same ole towns  
Picking Country and Rock 'n' Roll  
Crowd gettin' loud  
Band gettin' louder  
Till the whole thing's outa control

Hey, Hey Alright  
Gonna be alright tonight

We boogie all night  
Watch 'em brawl and fight  
People never listen like they should  
They want the same old songs  
Say there ain't nothing wrong  
With 'Roll Over...'  
...and 'Johnny B. Good'

#### Chorus

It's a one night stand  
And we're standing up for rock 'n' roll

Fifteen years  
Of smoke and beers

And fifteen thousand bars  
Nights get lonely  
When you're on your own  
With nothing but your old guitar

It's a one-night stand  
And we're standing up for rock 'n' roll



## OUTLAW RAMBLIN' BAND

I wrote this around the time that the Nashville "outlaw" music was in vogue and we had started our annual music tours of England. AS we got further into our tours the image seemed to fit. We did a variety of Country Rock which wasn't being done by many English performers at the time but threw in a few Shadows and Lonnie Donegan numbers. We were a long-haired, "American" sounding, gang of three decked out in rugged, chamois leather patch outfits. We had actually bought these outfits in a little specialty shop just off London's busy Oxford Street. We worked most gigs there as a trio, but our friend Alan Jones joined us in clubs that had a Hammond on stage. Most of our amps were Traynor, since we were sponsored by this Canadian company. After landing at Heathrow we picked up our equipment at Wing Music in Bromley, Kent and made the trek to England's Northeast. Kevin Pahl played a stack of Hohner keyboards, Sue-On played Rogers drums and I played my Fender Telecaster with my self-designed, patented B-bender. We played a different club every night -- and were enthusiastic tourists through the day. We wound up every tour with recording sessions in London, Newcastle and Pity Me, near



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### OUTLAW RAMBLIN' BAND

*(Written in Bromley, Kent and London, England)*

We're a travellin' ramblin' outlaw band  
Kevie, me and Suzy we travel the land  
We kinda got our minds a-set on leaving the West  
This prairie-land rebel band a-flyin' the nest  
Took a 747, ride to heaven by jet  
The closest that the most of us is ever gonna get  
Heathrow, luggage slow -- we fuss and we fret  
Sue, she's in the loo - she's trying to get her face wet.

#### Chorus

'Cause we're outlaws -- an outlaw ramblin' band  
Outlaws -- Outlaw ramblin' band

Tea time, cars in line on Westminster Bridge  
It's scary for a prairie boy from Bunclody Ridge  
Ride the M-5 -- still alive -- we're steaming up north  
Workin' for the workin' man to show our worth  
We bring on Lonnie Donegan -- they clap and they stomp  
And we sing a little song about an ole Cajun swamp  
We rant about Canada - we pick and we sing  
They can't understand 'American' -- "What's he sayin'?"

We're with the crowd -- singing loud -- yeh, we're starting to rock  
When Housey Man, up on the stand, says, "I say Chaps - Stop!"  
It's our hour, holy hour -- time to unwind  
Bingo is the single thing they got on their minds

Thirty nights of flashing lights -- the end of the grind  
Heading down to London town for studio time  
Suzy drums, Willie strums in old Soho  
Kevin just a revin' up the piano  
Yeh, we're a transported, imported semi-deported, genuine, certified  
Outlaw Ramblin' Band.



## Reelin' in Soho



*Reelin' in Soho* is an account of our first recording session in London, England. As suggested in the first verse, this was the culmination of a tour in which we -- "The Hillmans From Canada" -- had played over 30 one-nighters in night clubs and discos across Northern England.

Many nights found us in the ubiquitous Workingman Clubs where a house band opened at 7:00 pm, followed by opening acts which usually offered variety entertainment. We would then come on for a show set, after which there would be a long break for housie (bingo) - a national addiction. After this exciting gambling break we would return for a dance set -- but by 11:00 pm the dancers would call it a night since they had to work the next day.

Being so used to the long drives, long gigs and late nights back in Canada, it was hard for us to wind down so suddenly and every night found us driving around looking for some place which might still be open. We met some very colourful characters on these midnight rambles.

The audiences attended these clubs every night of the week and had seen it all, so it was especially rewarding to 'go down a bomb'... to 'bomb' has a different connotation there than it does in North America. It was tremendously exciting to study the dressing room walls which were festooned with pictures, cards and stickers left by previous entertainers -- even the Beatles, early in their careers, had toured this circuit. These backstage walls were seldom refurbished since it seemed that the more 'name' acts displayed, the more prestigious the club. Perhaps the most fascinating venues though, were the Country and Western Clubs where nearly everyone showed up in full Western regalia -- including boots, hats, gunbelts ... and western draws -- Geordie cowboys.

Our strangest and perhaps most memorable night occurred at Thirsk - a village in Yorkshire. Throughout the tour, we spent most mornings and afternoons being tourists - traipsing through castles, cathedrals, and pubs and across highlands and moors. Scarth, however, offered a special reward because it is home to Alf Wight, *aka James Herriot of All Creatures Great and Small* fame. We visited his veterinary office and toured his small museum just down the street.

Fittingly, the club we were to play was on the outskirts of town surrounded by a meadow or cow pasture. It was a 1920s pavilion-style hall. Our opening act for the night arrived late -- surrounded by an entourage of people in formal wear. He was a singer who had been married just a few hours before up in Newcastle. This set the mood for the whole evening -- the place seemed to explode and although the club should have been emptied by 11:00, the management barred the doors to keep out the local constabulary and the party continued into the wee hours. When Sue-On wearied of the drums, a succession of people -- our agent, the bartender and even the groom - took control of the sticks. Something right out of the fictional Darrowby.



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## REELIN' IN SOHO

Warm summer night in a green Bromley garden  
Done thirty nights of singin' -- runnin' 'round ole England  
Picking out the songs to lay down tomorrow  
Songs about lovin' -- leavin' -- and sorrow

Monday morning moving into Bromley Station  
Munchin' fish and chips wrapped in the news of the nation  
A Charing Cross stop and then we're out to Trafalgar  
Humpin' piano and draggin' a guitar

Chorus

Rockin' and rolling and reeling to Soho  
Boogie Woogie Woogie into London Town  
Rockin' and rolling and reeling in Soho  
Boogie Woogie Woogie till we get back home

Huff and puff and shove to where the lions and pigeons stand  
Wave and jump and whistle -- callin' for a cabbie man  
Cabbie man don't understand or talk Canadian  
Drive around in circles takin' every street he can

Later in the morning we're reeling in Soho  
Rocking a studio -- ten feet down below  
People on the street are dancing, pushing and shoving  
Listening to the band a reelin' and rocking



## SAIL ON 747



This is a Rock-a-Billy flavoured song. My first exposure to rock 'n' roll was through the Memphis Sun Records artists: Elvis, Carl Perkins, Johnny Cash, Jerry Lee Lewis, Roy Orbison, Ike Turner - The excitement generated by these early rockers has been a major musical influence.

The idea for the song came during a long wait at London's Heathrow Airport during a work-to-rule strike. Sue-On was pregnant with our first child, Ja-On, and we perhaps were a little nostalgic and homesick after having toured for seven weeks in a foreign land. It had been a very successful tour culminating with the recording of five sides in a London studio, but we have always been 'homebodies,' -- a defence, I guess, from the craziness of the road.

It was approaching harvest time on the prairies and we were looking forward to experiencing our unique fall rituals and even seeing the stubble fires which light up the night skies on every horizon. We had loved the experience of this, our first tour of England -- the Newcastle Brown Ale, the ocean, the history, the Geordies, clubs, football, housie, BBC, Blackpool ... everything -- but it was time for homefires.

The song was recorded three years later at Guardian Studios in northern England, during our third tour of the UK. This 24-track studio was set up in two adjacent row houses on High Street, in the tiny village of Pity Me, just outside the beautiful, historic City of Durham. The studio was a labour of love and brain child of owner/engineer Terry Gavaghan who saw it as a means of getting 'off the road' while still staying in the music industry. He invested the money he had saved touring as lead guitarist for the Carpenters -- here in this quaint little Yorkshire village. This choice of locale was perhaps not as unusual as it might first appear as England's Northeast is saturated with clubs and musicians.

We later performed *Sail On* at the televised Manitoba Association of Country Artists (MACA) Awards during Country Music Week ceremonies where we were backed by a large stage band complete with fully-charted arrangements -- quite a contrast to the small combo approach we took on the record.



## SAIL ON 747

Sail on mighty 747 Sail on, sail on  
Sail away to Manitoba sunshine (Repeat)  
Bobbin' around - city to town England shore to shore  
Boogie Woogie Rock - Tutti Frutti Bop  
They always shout for more

But there comes a time for home fires  
Prairie skies and nights  
Wheatfields far horizons  
Far off farmhouse lights

### CHORUS

Newcastle Brown Ale - North Sea gales  
Wee cars and Geordie cowboys  
Football - Housie - Telly and sweet tea  
Blackpool's grown-up toys



## THE HILLMAN EXPRESS

When the two other members retired from our Western Union band we used the name The Hillman Express for awhile. Eventually we became Bill and Sue-On Hillman. I wrote The Hillman Express as a signature piece for opening and closing some of our shows. Obviously it was meant to play on a train theme . . . just a rockin' dance number to get the audience jumping.



## HILLMAN EXPRESS

Get on board  
We'll make you more  
Than satisfied  
Whistle blowing  
Wheels a-rolling  
Come on and ride

Don't need no ticket  
There ain't no wicket  
There ain't no fee  
Our magic potion  
Is locomotion  
And ridin's free

### Chorus

Ride Ride Ride on through the night  
Rolling on outa sight  
Rockin' Express  
Speedin' through the west  
Ride Ride Ride  
On the Hillman Express

From prairie sidings  
To those exciting



Bright city lights  
The music's hummin'  
As we keep runnin'  
On through the night

Don't need no baggage  
We're gonna manage  
To get it on  
To every station  
'Cross the nation  
Come ride along

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## SeaQuest

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For most of my 40 years as a University and High School Educator  
I was sometimes compelled to integrate my love of music into my role as an educator.  
The following song poem / narration was written and performed for  
a graduating class of students and my teaching colleagues.

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## SEAQUEST

by Bill Hillman

*A dramatic reading for educators  
accompanied with guitar and rhythm riffs.*

MILIEU: FISHNET BACKDROP - 5 TELEVISION MONITORS - VIDEO WALLPAPER WITH OCEAN MOOD AUDIO/VIDEO -  
KEGS - CAPTAIN'S HAT/BLACK TURTLE NECK - MOOD LIGHTS -  
SHIPS LANTERNS - CHESTS - SOUND FX - STOOL - GUITAR - ETC.

Sadly, some navigators seek out little placid tide pools...  
...drop anchor...  
...and sit in tired... creaky-leaky dinghies...  
...while their young passengers look longingly...  
...expectantly...  
...out to open sea...

They yearn for the thrill of the salt spray in their faces  
and the toss of the waves  
and a chance to skim across infinite waters to distant adventures  
-- and to learn the skills to survive on this life sea.

Many of these tide poolers will either meet disaster  
when they do break out past the breakwaters,  
or will spend a lifetime as land lubbers --  
...frustrated...

...angry...  
and haunted with personal devils  
which constantly remind them of what they could have been.

One can study the theory behind seamanship --  
it can be mastered by most any hotshot yachtsman,  
but the experience of the old salt is invaluable  
when the going gets long... or rough.

He can read the tides...  
...the stars...  
...the wind...  
...he can talk to life in the deep...  
...he can create a course and navigate it...  
...he can sail by the seat of his pants...  
knowledge recollected allows him  
to cope with each unpredictable crisis along his course.

To the novice,  
the waves and cycles with which the old salt is so in tune,  
at first appear meaningless or incomprehensible  
but really they are just a part of life's cycle.

Just as in the oriental concept of yin and yang  
where two complementary forces flow into one another,  
so does night become day...  
...season follows season...  
...death follows birth...



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**BILL and SUE-ON HILLMAN:**  
**A 50-YEAR MUSICAL ODYSSEY**  
**THE BOOK**

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