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

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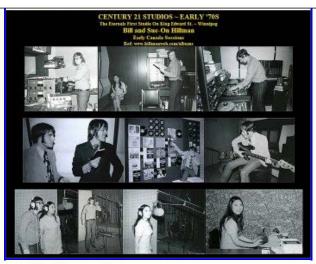


Photo Source: Hillman Photo Collage Archive

GIGS IN 'PEG CITY

Through the years we've played many gigs in Manitoba's capital, but most involved quick trips in and out -- and many of the appearances were for private gigs. Most of our work has been in rural areas, across the Prairies to the west, or in the UK or USA. As a result we never really had a chance to mix often with Winnipeg musicians and weren't too well known on their local city scene. As reported in our Media chapter we did receive numerous good write-ups in the Winnipeg press. Many of our Winnipeg gigs are integrated into other chapters, but here are a few that stand alone.



Mid-'60s - Community Clubs

Our rock band played all the Brandon Community Clubs, but when we hooked up with Winnipeg agent, Muriel Eckess, she started to book us into some of the swinging Winnipeg teen clubs as well as UMSU (University of Manitoba Student Union). She or one of our other agents also represented Winnipeg bands like The Quid. So we did some dances with them and Mickey Allan sang with us a few times both in Winnipeg and Brandon. We imported British records and tried to look the part in our Beatles suits, and for a while we carried a big phony amp cabinet which we trashed on stage a la The Who.

CKY Fall Festival of Stars I: Dovermen ~ Newbeats ~ Roger Miller

www.hillmanweb.com/cards/60/everlyall.jpg



Our band The Dovermen had driven into Winnipeg to play a number of Community Centres in 1964, but a much higher profile gig came our way at the Winnipeg Auditorium on November 16. We were booked to open the sell-out CKY Fall Festival of Stars with headliners The Everly Brothers, Roger Miller and the Newbeats. We were also asked to back the Newbeats who were riding high with hits like *Bread and Butter*, but we had only a few minutes rehearsal with them backstage. I sensed a bit of panic in their faces when they noticed how young two of our band guys looked, but the songs went well. Larry Henley's falsetto lead vocals surprised us since we had thought it had been a girl singing on the records (a few years later Henley wrote *Wind Beneath My Wings*).

We opened with a Shadows instrumental and followed with a Stones number, The Kinks' You Really Got Me and a few more current rockers. We then brought on the Newbeats. During our rushed backstage rehearsal, Larry Henley had shown me the ubiquitous blues riff they wanted featured on these hits. It served us well since it seemed to make up the backbone of each of their hits. We then rushed off, leaving my Fender Twin amp set up on stage as requested by Roger Miller's guitarist, Thumbs Carllile. The very entertaining Miller sang his current big hits including, Dang Me, King of the Road, Chug-a-lug, and Engine, Engine No. 9. Roger who was riding high on the charts with these hits originally had received top billing for the show.

We were, however, soon to see why the Everlys, early in the tour, were chosen to close the shows. Peering through the curtains from backstage it was a thrill for us to see Chad Allan and the Reflections (The Guess Who) sitting in the front row of the audience.

CKY Fall Festival of Stars II: Everlymania

The Everly Brothers' band included Sonny Curtis from Buddy Holly's Crickets, but sadly there wasn't too much time for chatting with him on the show. When the long-haired and charismatic Don and Phil Everly started belting out their many hits with their famous "goose-bump" harmonies the audience went wild. First, the crowd sang along with every song. It wasn't long though, before the screams began and the excited girls mobbed the stage as the Everly magic took hold. The fire warden threatened to close down the show a number of times if the fans didn't return to their seats.

This was our first experience with a really wild Elvis/Beatlemania type of audience. It was also the first time we had worked with male performers who wore stage

make-up... and who appeared strangely "glassy-eyed." When Sue-On and I started to perform so many of the Everly songs a few years later, we noticed that you can play the chords and melody from *Walk Right Back* (the Everlys' 1961 hit written by Sonny Curtis) when you sing Roger Miller's later 1965 hit *Engine*, *Engine Number Nine*. When told about that, Sonny Curtis had said, "Mad at Roger for copying me? No, I'm honoured." Sonny has written many hits including the theme for The Mary Tyler Moore TV show.

When we returned to the Aud to pack up next morning we found one of the Everlys' famous Gibson guitars that had been left behind a stage curtain. We were there when their road manager phoned from Minneapolis to track down the whereabouts of the instrument. It was soon after this show that we were booked to back Canadian rock idol, Bobby Curtola, on his Western Canada tour. We were about to see many more screaming audiences.

Politics 1967 Winnipeg Auditorium - Conservative Party Convention

We were invited to perform at a political convention to support Sterling Lyon in 1967. He was campaigning to replace Manitoba Premier Duff Roblin who had moved to federal politics. This proved to be a wild full-scale American-style convention held in the Winnipeg Auditorium -- the very same place where we had opened for the Everly Brothers and Roger Miller a few years earlier. We were caught up in the razzmataz hoopla and performed live and on television. Through the years we have performed in campaigns for all the major political parties. The only drawback to this has been the effort it takes to get them to pay for services.

Politics 1967 - Marlborough Hotel Lobby Show - Sterling Lyon

Following the Sterling Lyon convention melee in the Winnipeg Auditorium, his supporters moved to the lobby of the Marlborough Hotel. We provided background noise for the standing-room-only crowd. We have memories of candidate Lyon standing on sofas and tables and waving and shouting to the packed throng of conventioneers, while we threw in some songs to keep the crowd wound up. Although Mr. Lyon lost to Walter Weir on the third ballot he eventually won the seat of Premier 10 years later.

Record 1: Grain Exchange

In 1969 we were offered a recording contract with Galaxy Records of Winnipeg. Each of us rehearsed three numbers: fiddle tunes from Barry Forman, vocals from Jake Kroeger (one of which Bill sang lead on), ballads by Sue-On and guitar instrumentals and vocals by Bill.

Our dreams of recording in a glamorous modern studio were shattered when producer Alex Moodry set us up in front of a portable recording system in a room in the Winnipeg Grain Exchange on Main Street. He said echo could be added when the discs were pressed in Toronto, but the end result was excessive delay echo on everything including Warren Hannay's drums - god awful. The album cover that we designed was nice, though: a photo provided by CKX-TV which their cameraman took of us standing in front of the TV cameras. Unfortunately, the back cover, designed by Galaxy, was a bit of a disappointment. Most of the liner notes I had written were left off to make room for ads for Galaxy's line of Ukrainian records. This Ukrainian connection did get us some sales in Chicago, however,

where there was apparently a sizeable ethnic market.

Mach Schau! ~ Memories of the 1970 Man-Pop Mud Bowl Rock Festival

www.hillmanweb.com/cards/gigs/manpopall.jpg



1970, Manitoba's Centennial Year, saw our touring limited mainly to Manitoba -- a full schedule that took us everywhere across the province and into Saskatchewan -- from tiny villages to cities. Most of the gigs were shows and parades from our mobile stage, but we also played a scattering of arena shows and dances.

We were disappointed to miss the historic Festival Express whose train stopped at Winnipeg on their

journey westward. But there was no way we were going to miss ManPop 70, a really hyped rock festival at the Winnipeg Stadium on August 29 - just after the completion of our summer tour. The bill featured top Manitoba and Canadian groups along with the headliners: Led Zeppelin and Iron Butterfly.

There were rain showers all day. Sue-On and I went across to Polo Park Mall and purchased plastic dropsheets that we wrapped ourselves in as we sat on the turf near the stage. We enjoyed fine performances by the opening acts -- especially Diane Heatherington and The Merry-Go-Round. Just after Chilliwack's afternoon performance the drizzle and showers morphed into a full-fledged downpour. Word came from the promoters that everything was being moved into the nearby Winnipeg Arena.

We were close to the stage and, since the exit was near stage left, we pushed into a good position in the queue to the arena.

We found good seats in the upper tier and settled in for a long wait, while roadies worked frantically to set up a mishmash of makeshift sound and lighting equipment on the arena stage. Meanwhile, hundreds of unlucky stadium ticket holders who couldn't get into the already filled-to-over-capacity arena were rioting and breaking windows at the arena entrance.

Our upper position in the balcony gave us a good view of the stage and the crowd below, but the view was occasionally fogged out by the heavy clouds of medicinal smoke that were billowing up from the party crowd on the floor.

After heavy-duty backstage politics the headliners agreed to "mach schau" -- and a driving, exciting show it was. We stayed to the end of the event and didn't start our long drive back to Maple Grove until the wee, wee hours of the morning.



Click for full-screen size



Hillmans in the Crowd
Right side of photo ~ about 1/3 up
Perusing John Einarson's large photo of the crowd
filing out of the Winnipeg Stadium - in the rain to move over to the Winnipeg Arena.
We spotted ourselves -both in white shirts and Bill wearing sunglasses.

U of M Grad Dances

Through the years we played a string of University of Manitoba grad dances in the convention rooms of the Fort Garry, North Star and Marlborough Hotels. Most were for the Aggie students. . . great fun. They took pride in playing up their country roots when they partied: tuxedos with cowboy boots, cowboy hats and western regalia. Another interesting University gig was a show we did as part of an ethnic festival in the University of Winnipeg. The opening acts featured a long line of ethnic singers, Caribbean bands, and a troupe of interpretative jazz dancers. We did our usual country/rock bit.

Great West Life

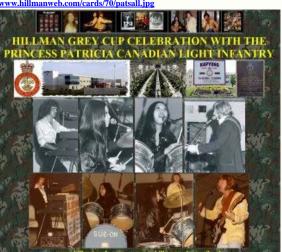
We played very few beverage rooms in Winnipeg. Most of our gigs were for weddings or private parties at various clubs and hotels. Some of the best were the annual Christmas parties for Great West Life in their large dining room area. I would teach school all day, we would drive into Winnipeg where we lugged the equipment to an upper floor and played a long night with a few hours overtime. The trips back home were not always without incident as I've described elsewhere in the "Trouble On The Trail" chapter. A few years later, our bandmate, Kerry Morris a tech whiz, worked for Great West until he formed his own successful computer company.

Winnipeg Pub Gigs

One pub/bar gig that stands out was the St. Vital Hotel. We were scheduled to record the next morning so to help pay the costs we had taken this booking. But another reason to take the gig was to try out a new piece of equipment we had rented for the session: a "Leslie" rotating speaker cabinet made by Fender. I had planned to play guitar through it on the "24 Hours from Tulsa" session. It worked well, but we couldn't afford to buy it at that time. Later, I did buy a number of "organ tone" effects boxes for my guitar. This led to purchasing a huge Elkatone "Leslie" cabinet which Sue-On eventually took over for her keyboard basses (Hohner, Fender, Moog).

Princess Pats Commando Raid

www.hillmanweb.com/cards/70/patsall.jpg



We played for the Princess Patricia troops at CFB Winnipeg (Club 61?) on a Grey Cup weekend. The 2nd Battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (2PPCLI) is a highly decorated and experienced fighting force formed at the start of WWI and named after the **Duke of Connaught's daughter Princess** Patricia of Connaught. They received commendations for their heroism in the two World Wars, the Korean Conflict and many UN peacekeeping assignments. In more recent times the Battalion has been moved to the Kapyong Barracks at CFB

Shilo, MB and they have fought in War in Afghanistan since 2001.

The Pats are a rough and ready fighting force and it was an honour to be asked to play for the Grey Cup party at their club. These hardy army guys were a particularly rowdy group that night. We carried our gear in through the kitchen where we were met by a guy, bottle in hand, who had just staggered in from the dance area. He was taken aback when he saw Sue-On: "Wha da fuk ar yu doin' here." . . . we carried on into the stage area, where we had to step over bodies of two drunken combatants rolling on the floor pounding each other. One had the other by the testicles in one hand and was pounding him in the face with the other fist.

Our music seemed to settle things down a bit, but the party got pretty rowdy as the night went on. At the end of the show they were still ready for action so they hired us for two more hours overtime. By the time we packed up, those still standing were obviously primed for even more action. We heard in the news the next day that many of them had piled into cars after the dance and had driven to downtown Winnipeg where they carried out a commando raid on a hotel which they left looking like a war zone.

CFB Winnipeg

We were such a hit at CFB Winnipeg that a base entertainment committee later hired us for a much larger base function through a Winnipeg booking agency. This also went well and they were expecting us to return in a few weeks to play for a dance in honour of Winston Churchill's daughter whom they were expecting to visit the base. The booking didn't materialize -- we heard later that the band that ran the booking agency took that plum gig for themselves. Over the years we had used Winnipeg entertainment agencies very seldomly . . . and this was the last time. We carried on booking all future Winnipeg gigs privately.

Club La Verendrye

We did a multitude of recording sessions at Century 21 Studios in Winnipeg in the '70s. We had a close association with the Hildebrand and Paley brothers, who directed us to a string of good gigs. One of our regular venues was Club La Verendrye -- the French Club in St. Boniface. Ted Paley who had played drums on some of our sessions sometimes sat in with us at the club.

We have some great memories of super dances and friendly people there. Doorman/manager Levis always made us feel so welcome. One of the women on staff insisted on calling Sue-On, Simone. . . I guess it had more of a French ring to it :). In recent years we re-visited the site and were disappointed to see that the building had been converted to an office block and bowling alley.

The International Inn

This large hotel near the airport (now called The Victoria Inn) was a regular spot for us to play. We often played in the pool room on a dance floor extended over the water of the pool. I always had visions of the dance scene in *It's A Wonderful Life* with Jimmy Stewart and Donna Reed. Fortunately, the floor never once contracted and we stayed high and dry.

We played other rooms in the hotel complex, including some major galas in the large convention room. Perhaps the most unusual part of the hotel we played in was the Hollow Mug which specialized in dinner theatre. Occasionally during a lull in theatre playdates we were called on to provide entertainment for dancing. On one occasion we provided the musical/dance interlude for a *Bye Bye Birdie* cast. . . great fun working with these seasoned performers.

Red River Cruise Ships

We played a number of gigs on river cruises on the Red River flowing north out of Winnipeg including the large paddle wheel vessel. These were private functions for which we provided entertainment and music for dancing. The ship would depart in the evening so that the passengers could catch the sunset and then party on under moonlight as we sailed by the lights of Winnipeg and the cabins that lined the shore. The party goers tended to leave their inhibitions behind and things got a little raunchy at times, but I can't remember anyone falling overboard. They were unusual bookings that we looked forward to the first few times, but loading our equipment on and off the vessel got a bit tedious.

The Fort Garry Hotel

We set up in numerous rooms in this grand old hotel with its gorgeous woodwork and wallcoverings and high ornate ceilings adorned with spectacular chandeliers. We played private functions such as weddings, conventions and graduations. Little did we know that 40 years later we would be attending graduation ceremonies and banquets here for our kids. Son Ja-On received his first Massage Therapy certificate here and the banquet for daughter China-Li's Doctor of Medicine class was in a room we had performed in so many years before.

MACA Board of Directors

After our first MACA Award for Entertainers of the Year I was elected to the MACA Board of Directors. Between teaching, parenthood, performing, and work on the Boggy Creek Mountain Music Festival Board our schedule was very tight and Kevin Pahl's dad Howard, offered to fly Boggy Creek Organizer Lewis Kaselitz and me into Winnipeg for some of the meetings. A great chance to get to know the Winnipeg music scene and musicians a little better.

Downs Motor Inn

Ma Henning of the Downs Motor Inn was a strong supporter of country music in Winnipeg and we made a number of special appearances there with artists such as Dick Damron and the Family Brown. Ma's daughter Heidi and husband Scott later took over the Trails West Motor Inn in Brandon where they carried on their support of live music. Mrs. Henning's death in 2009 brought forth a flood of tributes from the media and the music world.

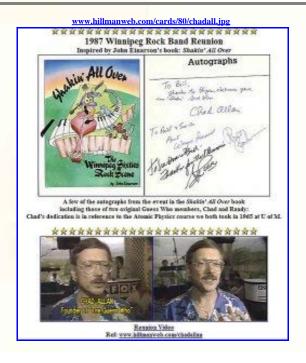
Wayne Russell, the UK Music Guru

In summer of '87, the Variety Club of Manitoba sponsored *Shakin' All Over - A Bands and Fans Reunion* at the Winnipeg Convention Centre. We weren't invited to play at this gig, but since we knew many of the bands and media personalities, and had played many gigs in Winnipeg in "the old days," we drove in for it.

The event was fittingly named for organizer John Einarson's book, Shakin' All Over -- a title which pays homage to the big hit that was sung by Winnipeg's Chad Allan of the Guess Who. We sat at Chad's table along with Wayne Russell. Wayne had provided the pipeline for many of the songs from the UK that had been Guess Who (Chad Allan and the Reflections) staples before the Beatles led the British Music Invasion to our shores.

Wayne lives in Brandon now, but he and Chad had grown up in the same area of Winnipeg. He had a friend who sent him tapes and discs of all the latest music from England, and most of these songs and groups were unknown in North America. Great fodder for a band looking for unique material. We first met Wayne at the Country Music Centre on Brandon's 10th Street where he was manager for many years. He always had some great new records for us to hear and supplied us with many rare discs. His knowledge of classic country and rock 'n' roll has served him well through the years as he has written countless liner notes and reviews for song compilations all over the world.

A Shakin' Reunion



Winnipeg's Shakin' All Over 1987 Reunion was an exciting event. Winnipeg rock musicians who hadn't touched their instruments for decades got together, dragged out their old song lists, and whipped up enough material to round out sets to perform. The highlight of the evening though, was seeing former Guess Who members on stage playing so many of the band's hits. Memories reached a fever pitch when another famous musician who got his start in Winnipeg also made his way to the stage. Neil Young strapped on a Les Paul and joined his brothers in arms of so many years ago for a super jam.

When the dynamite show closed down the audience filed out and the musicians gathered in a large room behind the stage area. Since we knew many of the guys we were looking forward to joining the after-show gathering to talk over old times. Burton Cummings was wandering alone unwinding on the stage as we started to cross it to get to the party area. Through the evening some of the Guess Who had signed our Einarson's *Shakin' All Over* book, so we asked if he would add his signature. Burt refused. Sue-On was so embarrassed and felt so out of place that she wouldn't go further. We went home.

Why Not Chad Allan?

(An opinion piece that I circulated to the press following the the Guess Who receiving Honourary Music Doctorates from Brandon University back in 2001)
As pleased and excited as we were about the academic honour bestowed upon some of the Guess Who members by Brandon University, we are saddened and somewhat bewildered at the exclusion of the founding leader of the group, Chad Allan. As "Allan and the Silvertones," "Chad Allan and the Reflections," "Chad Allan and the Expressions," and eventually "Guess Who," the original members of the group: Chad Allan, Randy Bachman, Garry Peterson and Jim Kale had a string of hit singles and albums.

It was only because of a recording company and radio station contest promotion that helped launch their first international hit -- "Shakin' All Over "-- that they were accidentally saddled with the name "Guess Who" (a name that the band members detested at the time) and a SNAFU that resulted in Chad's name being left out of the band's future billing. It was also around this time that a very young Burton Cummings was enlisted as the band's keyboard player and second lead singer. Allan and Cummings shared singing and fronting duties for American tours and more hit recording sessions until Allan bowed out of the group because of health, and other problems. Chad Allan returned to university to complete his degree, but some time later teamed again with the Bachman brothers and Fred Turner to form the group which eventually became Bachman Turner Overdrive.

The Chad Allan Legacy

www.hillmanweb.com/cards/roots/chad2all.jpg

The Chad Allan group was a major inspiration for many Canadian musicians, and Brandon bands in particular, as he regularly performed in the Brandon area in the '60s. It seems ironic that the band that Chad formed and nurtured should be so honoured while he receives no recognition for his



achievements. My observation is that on all of the band's first singles and albums, Chad Allan was the group's lead singer, songwriter, producer, arranger, rhythm guitarist, front man, agent and often piano player, bassist

and drummer, as well. He was responsible for putting the Cummings, Peterson, Bachman and Kale line-up together in the first place.

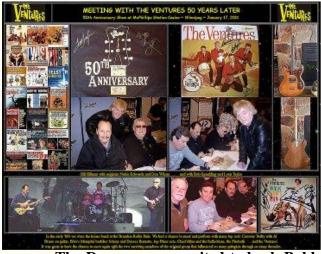
It was under Allan's leadership and with his lead vocals that the band achieved their first international hit: "Shakin' All Over," as well as a string of other hits: "Tribute To Buddy Holly," "Stop Teasin' Me," "Tough Enough," "Shy Guy," "Made In England," "A Shot of Rhythm and Blues," "Till We Kissed," "Hey, Ho, What You Do To Me," etc. It was also through his connections with the British music scene and his foresight in promoting this material in the band's performances that Western Canada became aware of Cliff Richard and the Shadows, The Beatles and other great British groups long before the British Invasion hit our shores.

Since Brandon University chose to honour later arrivals to the Guess Who, local pickup guys who came and went, my feeling is that the original founder who brought all the ingredients together and worked for years in guiding the band to national stardom, and then to the brink of their international explosion, should share some of this recognition with his long-time bandmates and later musicians who had jumped aboard for the ride.

Previous to the Awards Ceremony I set up impressive Guess Who window and showcase displays in the BU Music Building, using items from my collection. But I also tried to convince the Awards committee of the importance of including Chad Allan in the ceremony. To no avail. Decisions had been carved in stone. They said that at the band's request they already had made changes to the proceedings by presenting Jim Kale's award separately at a later time. They weren't prepared to further alter their plans. Chad Allan has certainly "fallen through the cracks."

Casino Ventures

www.hillmanweb.com/cards/60/venturesall.jpg



When our old '60s group, The Dovermen, re-united to back Bobby Curtola in his *Sock Hop Reunion* show, Sue-On joined the band on congas. This went so well that when Bobby and his regular band played the casino in Winnipeg she was asked to join them in the show. Bobby has invited us to a number of Casino shows, and hanging out backstage and in the dressing rooms is always a fascinating experience. Through the years I've always maintained that the best seat at any show is backstage or in the wings. I get very restless and even uncomfortable sitting out front with the sit-down audiences.

A few years ago Manitoba music legend, Ray St. Germain, generously invited Bobby and us to be his special guests at one of his Casino shows that featured the whole talented St. Germain family. Another memorable Casino visit was the 50th Anniversary show of the Ventures group -- a group we had met and worked with almost 50 years ago in the Brandon Roller Rink where we worked as the house band. There are two surviving members of this world famous group that seem to be more popular than ever -- a great chance to get my rarest Ventures albums autographed.



NEXT: 10. Troubles and Triumphs on the Trail

Gig Notes IX: Winnipeg Gigs

SUPPLEMENTARY RESOURCES

Related features with expanded notes and photos that we've created on our main site:

BILL and SUE-ON HILLMAN ECLECTIC STUDIO

 $\underline{www.hillmanweb.com}$

Century 21 Recording Photos

Shakin' All Over

Everly Brothers Tribute (from our ROOTS section)

Buddy Holly Tribute (from our ROOTS section)

Chad Allan Tribute (from our ROOTS section)

Ventures (from our ROOTS section)

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www.hillmanweb.com/book/gigs

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