

Norval becomes Nashville when Opry North rolls

By CHRIS AAGAARD
Herald Staff Writer
"Are you ready to go?"
(Warm applause, some cheering, still too much conversation.)
"I can't hear youuuu..."
(Crowd erupts, cheers, whistles, even clackers and bells.)
The countdown was on. Master of ceremonies Bill Kelly was doing his usually splendid job of revving up the crowd and, for the time being, a couple of the band members twanged away on steel guitar backed up with a little casual bass drum and snare.
It was embarrassing apparent that out of the 300 or so people comfortably packed into the Norval Junction Sunday afternoon (11:30 a.m. in beautiful

downtown Norval, just west of Brampton, Ontario... I was the only one who wasn't a regular or a diehard country and western fan.
While thinking about how out of place I was, not wearing cowboy boots or a feathered western hat (even my belt buckle looked conservative), Bill stepped up to the mike again. The show was about to begin.
"OK, let's roll tape," he said, and once again, the audience of young and old weekend cow pokes exploded in merriment as if the Argos had been on the winning end of a 61-3 bout with Edmonton.
NASHVILLE
CFGM radio 1320 has been using the Norval Junction to



Johnny Burke and Eastwind led off Sunday's tapings of Opry North at the Norval Junction Radio station CFGM, Canada's number one country and western radio, hosts the hour-long sessions of Opry, bringing in top C and W talent, as well as giving lesser-known artists breaks they might wait years to get. To many people who tune into the program across Canada (7 p.m. on CFGM-AM 1320 in Toronto), Norval has become kind of a northern Nashville and the tapings conducted at the Junction attract a wide age-range of listeners. Another taping session will be held Nov. 22 at 5 p.m. following the Grey Cup game.
(Herald photo)

tape its immensely popular "Opry North" show since last spring. The top country and western music station in Canada, it distributes Opry North to about 25 other stations across the country; even though the unenlightened may think that little ol' Norval is located "west of Brampton", for many people who tune into the show (7 p.m. Saturdays in Toronto), Norval must be Canada's own Nashville.
Every time the CFGM equipment truck rolls into the Junction, two tapings of Opry North are done. Last Sunday's shows, for example, featured superlative Canadian C and W stars like Johnny Burke and Eastwind, Glory-Anne Carriere and David Thompson, who has three records in the top ten on the country charts.
Orval Prophet (Ronnie's uncle) was there, too, and so was Donna and Leroy (from television's Tommy Hunter Show), Rick Fielding, the Gar-

risson Brothers and Mary Bailey.
Produced and directed by Gord Ambrose, CFGM's music director, the show has probably done more for budding country music artists than any single program for its kind in Canada. In the five years Opry North has been on the air, listeners have tuned into several of the best musicians in the business, major drawing cards like Carroll Baker, Ronnie Prophet, Buck Owens and George Hamilton IV.
As long as people listen, new musicians looking for their first big break eventually get exposed. Opry production assistant John Vercillo explained.

SAME WAY
"That's the concept behind the show," he said, "to promote Canadian country music, in much the same way (radio station) WSM promoted musicians in the U.S."

Despite efforts by the Canadian Radio - television and Telecommunications Commission aimed at encouraging radio stations to give unestablished native artists airtime, there still appears to be a stigma attached to homegrown sounds: lingering doubt about whether or not they can stand up to the popularity of American or European artists.

Professional barriers — "I've made it, Jack, what's holding you back?" — fall on the Opry stage. Within the same taping, artists who travel on their wave of popularity across Canada gladly join less

fortunate colleagues who are struggling for a break to get them out of an unproductive club and bar circuit.

And the audience is always appreciative. After all, they know that Opry North has been a launching pad for some great talent. Recalling the early days of favorite performers before they reached "star status" is something fans love to do. If you ask long-time country music aficionados to draw a time chart for some of the best performers they can think of, appearances on Opry North would likely figure in there somewhere.

SUMMER SHOWS
CFGM also sponsors a number of other country music entertainment events during the summer. There are frequent concerts at Brampton's Chinguacousy Park, where as many as 8,000 fans per show perch themselves on surround-

ing hills to take in the excitement.

Although things move indoors during the fall — notably at the Norval Junction — the enthusiasm is ever present and it reaches out from the radio to capture audiences from St. John's, Newfoundland, to Victoria, B.C.
"Let's have a big welcome for all our friends out at CHFX

in Halifax." Billy Kelly bellowed and again the audience responded as if everyone has a relative somewhere in the Maritimes.

Opry North will be back in Norval Nov. 22 for two more tapings, and CFGM is planning a jolly Christmas show scheduled for mid-December. More information about that at a later date.



One artist who drew quite a crowd at Opry North at the Norval Junction last Sunday was top ten recording artist David Thomson, seen above signing his recent album "A Sketch of Country" on Citation Records. Opry is hosted by CFGM radio 1320 and following tapings at the Junction (the former Way Jay club) is syndicated to about 25 other stations from St. John's, Newfoundland, to Victoria, B.C.
(Herald photo)

Local Kinsmen enjoy C&W show 'residuals'

Besides Norval Junction's owners, one local group which certainly enjoys the arrival of CFGM's Opry North entourage for tapings is the local Kinsmen Club.
Kin members are the fellows winding in between tables, dodging sprawled cowboy boots, taking orders for drinks and stopping occasionally to raise an eyebrow at some of the ladies poured into their western designer jeans. While it's the

guys serving, it's the Kinetes at the taps.
Although its hard work (Sunday liquor laws insist that patrons eat while drinking and stay in their seats with their glasses), the Kinsmen enjoy profits from the bar, money which eventually goes into the club's numerous community projects.
It was something which was arranged with the radio station, the Junction's management (Chris Leech

and Jim Robertson) and the Kinsmen. Apparently, it's worked out well for all parties concerned.
"They volunteered to help out," Opry North co-producer Richard LeVear said.
"They look after catering the food and the refreshments and they do a super job for us. I really must congratulate them and we're proud to have them as part of the Opry North team."

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