

## It's Coda the West

# Country picker's a 'Lifer'

By BRIAN MacLEOD  
Herald Staff

Country and western music fans who dropped by the Hollywood Tavern in Norval last weekend surely enjoyed the "group de jour" called Coda the West.

Band leader Wendell Ferguson, who enjoys "fast country picking" on his guitar, gave the collection of freelance musicians the "group de jour" description because of their nature. Depending on the event, there could be three, four or five members, and they're always changing except for himself, vivacious keyboard artist and fellow vocalist Helen Kameka, and base guitarist Mark Dineen.

At the Hollywood last weekend drummer Mike Billard and steel guitar player Burke Carroll, joined in.

Wendell and his partner David Ferri own the Orchard recording studios in Huttonville. At Orchard, famed country stars such as Carroll Baker, Stompin' Tom Connors, Al Cherney, and Jane Siberry have put their notes on tape.

Wendell, who describes himself as a session guitarist, actually played on Siberry's last album, *The Walking*.

But Coda the West (Coda means the end of a song) has backed many well-known country musicians in concerts throughout southern Ontario, and it was those gigs which enticed Wendell and the rest of the band out of the studios and back in front of the lights - and thirsty crowds.

"I never lost the itch to play," says Wendell, even though he's stuck mainly to studio work since 1980.

"I'm a lifer. I think I'll crawl on stage when I'm 80 and do my last gig."

The 34-year-old Streetsville native grew up listening to Hank Williams, mainly because of his parents' taste for the old country classics. But it's the fast moving country music which has captured Coda the West's attention now. Faster, contemporary music is mixed with "old clunkers" to keep all types of country enthusiasts pleased.

Coda the West mixes in some originals to test the crowd but "you'd never know they're originals unless we told you," says Wendell.

Having worked with seasoned pros like George Hamilton IV, two-time country Vocalist of the Year Marie Bottrell and fiddle player Al Cherney has kept Wendell in touch with the contemporary country scene.

And playing Ron and Bob Hachey's Hollywood Tavern gives the band a chance to play in front of a hometown audience, says Wendell.

His own mentors are Roy Buchanan and Larry Carlton.

Wendell doesn't want to return to the road fulltime but earning anywhere from \$100 to \$300 a night "fast country pickin'" is alright with him for the near future.

Coda the West has a series of venues coming up in southern Ontario including an appearance at the Sherway Inn with Marie Bottrell at Highway 427 and Brown's Line, March 9-10.

The band plans to bring its "group de jour" to Georgetown in May.



Country singer Wendell Ferguson demonstrates some "fast country picking" during his band Coda the West's performance at the Hollywood Tavern on Friday. The band, which is made up mostly of freelance session musicians, was a hit with the country folk at the Hollywood Wendell co-owns Huttonville's Orchard recording studios which have played host to some well-known country singers over the years. Coda the West will return to Georgetown in May. (Herald photo)

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### The Roaring 20's

The Georgetown Choral Society provided two Enchanting Evenings on the weekend, with special concerts at St. George's Anglican Church hall. The Society had as much fun as the audience, presenting renditions from the past, including a Roaring Twenties set. (Herald photo)

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