

ARTS

Local man's song featured on The Fifth Estate

Mandic's 'Razor Wire' inspired by ex-con

By Stephanie Thiessen
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

It was a journey within a journey. Peter Mandic had already started down the road of songwriting when he took a music train tour — called Roots on the Rails — in 2004 that promised to provide inspiration and advice from fellow musicians.

What Mandic didn't know was he was about to embark upon a great friendship that would ultimately land one of his songs a spot on national television. Wednesday night, Mandic's song 'Razor Wire' was featured on CBC's The Fifth Estate in an episode chronicling the life of the song's subject, Wayne Carlson — the man Mandic and his wife, Jill, met on that long train journey.

Wednesday morning, as the Brookville resident geared up for a rare evening spent watching TV, his excitement was evident.

"After six years of songwriting, to think that my song's going to be on national TV, it blows my mind," Mandic said. "Something may come of it, or it may not. I'm just thrilled to be part of Wayne's story and provide the music. Our hearts are connected."

Razor Wire will be one of the songs featured on Mandic's third CD, which he expects to record in the summer.

The friendship between Mandic and Carlson is one some people might have a hard time comprehending.

Mandic's mother did.

"When I told my mom I met Wayne, she said, 'Why are you his friend?'"

Her caution came about due to Carlson's notoriety as a prison Houdini, having broken out of 13 North American jails. On that train tour, he was presenting a workshop about his experiences in prison and talking about his book, Breakfast with the Devil: The Story of a Professional Jailbreaker.

But his reputation reflects just a fraction of the man, Mandic said. "He's got strong morals and wouldn't hurt a fly."

Shortly after, Mandic wrote a song called Carlson that outlined how the man ended up in jail and his ensuing escapes. He played a rough version of the song for Carlson, who became quite emotional at the insightful lyrics.

Not long after that, Mandic learned that his friend was in jail once more for violating parole. In August, Mandic received a poem Carlson had written about his girlfriend, with an inquiry of whether he could turn it into a song. The poem expressed the prisoner's feelings about being denied freedom and longing to get out, back to the person who loves him.

It was a task gratefully accepted, made more challenging by the fact Mandic normally writes the melody and then the lyrics.

To this day when Mandic performs Razor Wire for his audiences, people are affected by it, he said.

Mandic first pursued songwriting in 1999 and began taking courses at Humber College. He'd played guitar since he was young, and it seemed the logical progression.

"I found it was something really fun

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