

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT: *The entertainer known as Canada's Country Gentleman brings his music and his charm to Markham*

Tommy Hunter takes a bow

BY NOREEN O'LEARY
CORRESPONDENT

Get ready, music fans, Canada's Country Gentleman is coming to town.

As part of a North American tour, legendary musician Tommy Hunter will be performing in Markham for the first time in his 50 years of entertaining.

At just nine years old, Hunter saw his idol Roy Acuff on stage for the very first time, and was already learning his first guitar chords.

"That's when I first found out about country music," Hunter said.

"I knew from that moment on that performing was what I wanted to do."

Hunter's first professional engagement was at age 10, and he has since entertained audiences across North America through live performances, radio shows and television appearances.

In 1965, *The Tommy Hunter Show* debuted, a 30-minute black and white family program with a country feel.

From the very beginning, Hunter's aim was to bring respect and credibility to the country music industry by involving the best writers and production people available.

"We tried to get country music out of the barn so that even if you did not like the music, we'd still provide entertainment and a good cross-section of guests," he said during an interview.

Reigning for 27 years on television, *The Tommy Hunter Show* made history as the longest running weekly show of its kind before leaving the air in June 1992.

The show has been credited with hosting virtually every

major country act in North America and became a vital showcase for up-and-coming artists, many of whom have gone on to major popularity, including Garth Brooks, The Judds and Shania Twain.

"We hope that we were responsible for getting them started in some small way," Hunter said.

Of all his accomplishments, Hunter cites his television show as one of which he is extremely proud.

"Being able to last on television longer than 13 weeks was a great achievement," he said.

"A lot of people assumed that if you made a hit record you were guaranteed to be a big television star, but it was a lot of work. I'm very grateful to the fans who supported the show for so many years."

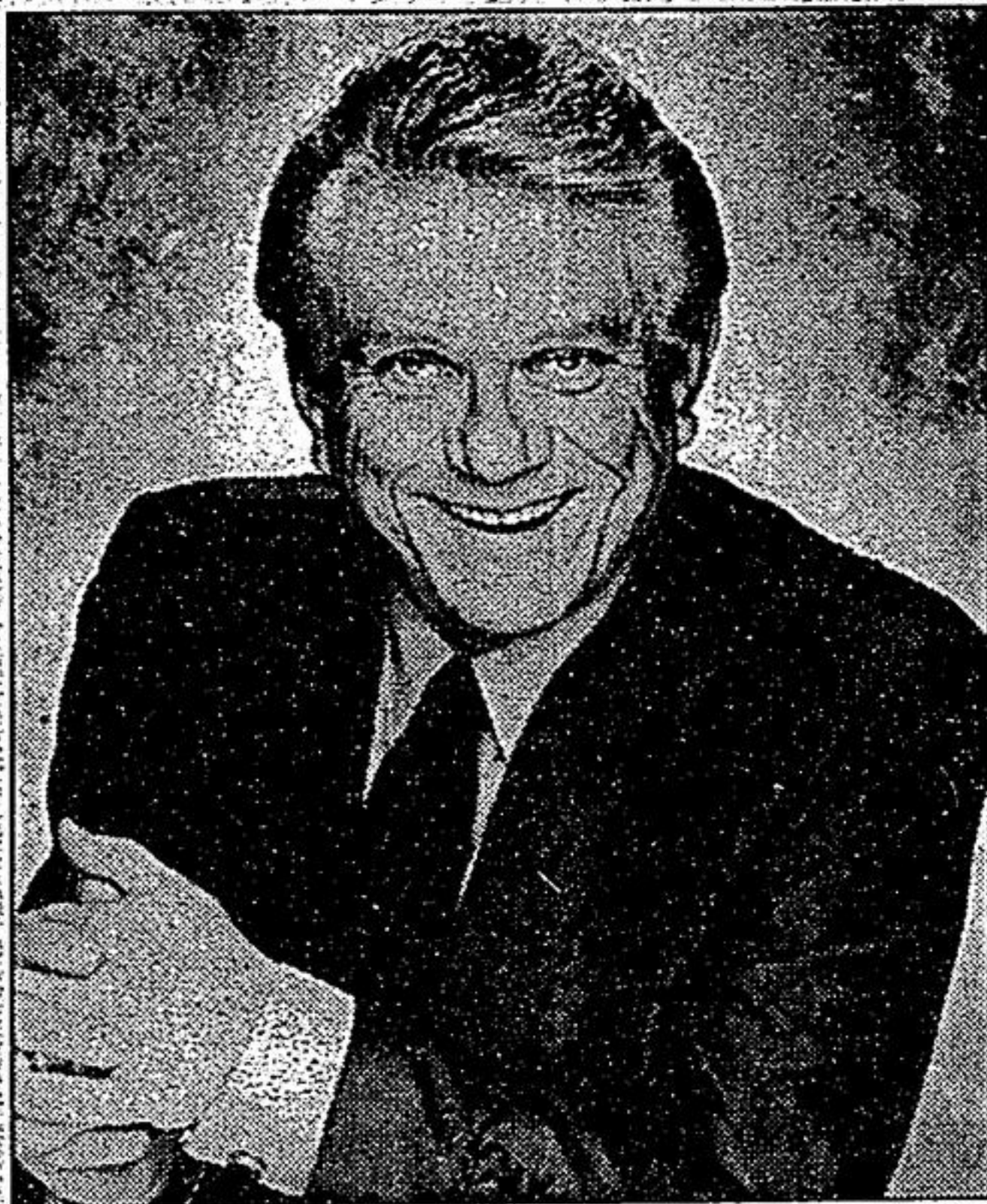
For now, Hunter is focusing his energy on live performances. During his television days, Hunter said he didn't have enough time to devote to road shows.

Since the show ended in 1992, he's been touring about 70 days a year throughout Canada and the United States, and says he loves entertaining live audiences.

"To any performer there is nothing like the stage," Hunter said. "Night after night is an instant reaction; anything can happen."

Hunter said his success as a live performer is a result of his ability to read his audience at each show, a technique he learned at a young age.

"In the early days I was always being thrust into different audiences," he said. "I'd always try to read my audience beforehand so that when I went out there I wouldn't be pushing my music on them, but rather entertaining them. I don't



Tommy Hunter makes his first appearance in Markham Feb. 8, 9 and 10.

like gimmicks that distract. Entertaining is my main objective."

Hunter is dedicated to his fans, and after every concert spends hours signing autographs as a way of thanking them.

"The fans are extremely important," he said. "Many of them have supported me for a long time, and continue to support me today. I like to maintain a high standard with them."

In 1990, Hunter was inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame Walkway of Stars. He has also received the Order of Ontario and the Order of Canada, recognizing his exceptional public career and his exemplary family life.

In addition to music, Hunter has developed an interest in amateur photography and boating. He is also deeply committed to using his talents on behalf of those less fortunate. For most of his career, Hunter has been involved with charitable organizations such as the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation and the Starlight Foundation.

Tommy Hunter will be performing at the Markham Theatre Feb. 8 to 10. Tickets are \$42.25 each and are available through the box office or by calling 305-7569.

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Fans can meet Britney Spears

NOREEN O'LEARY
CORRESPONDENT



BRITNEY SPEARS

Teen singing sensation Britney Spears is making an appearance at Markville Shopping Centre Friday to promote her debut album *Baby One More Time*.

According to Music World manager Chad Magoffin, the appearance is expected to last from 5 to 7 p.m. and will include a three-song performance in the centre court and autograph session.

Mall manager Clive Baxter said he's expecting about 1,000 fans. "Britney certainly has a large fol-

lowing among our young customers," Baxter said. "This is our opportunity to give something back to them."

Fans can watch Spears on Much Music early Friday afternoon before she makes her way to Markham, and on *Electric Circus* later that night.



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