

COMING UP

Eaglesmith promises 'Johnny Carson/ Rolling Stones' show

BY SANDRA BOLAN
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Fred Eaglesmith grew up singing in church, the school choir and working on the family farm.

It wasn't until he was 12 years old when Mr. Eaglesmith saw "some cheesy (Elvis) movie" on TV, did he decide he wanted to be a rock 'n roller.

Four decades later, Mr. Eaglesmith has "this really big, small following" and he wouldn't change it for anything.

Mr. Eaglesmith plays Stouffville's Royal Canadian Legion Nov. 8, a show, which he described as "Johnny Carson meets the Rolling Stones".

Tiff Ginn will open for Mr. Eaglesmith and return to the stage as part of his band.

Last year, Mr. Eaglesmith and his band The Travelling Steam Show performed 266 shows. So far this year, 203.

Mr. Eaglesmith said they're one of the last full-time rock and roll shows around and "if we go home, there might not be any left".

He gets to play to 200 people a night anywhere in the world, have artists such as Toby Keith, Alan Jackson and Miranda Lambert cover his songs and still walk around Toronto virtually unnoticed.

"I would quit," Mr. Eaglesmith said of the Elvis-like fame he initially sought as a

teenager, but realized in his 20s he didn't want.

Mr. Eaglesmith thought part of being like Elvis meant he had to write his own songs. He started by penning religious poetry for school, then heard John Prine and realized "I could write that bare to the bone". So he started to write about life on his family's 200-acre farm near Dunnville.

Mr. Eaglesmith spent 10 to 15 years writing before he became famous.

"I got to write the bad out of me," he said.

At 15, his father, who was not all that thrilled with his son's foray into rock and roll, drove his teenager into Hamilton, where Mr. Eaglesmith spent the \$12 he had been saving on a guitar from Zellers.

Mr. Eaglesmith's father wasn't the only less-than-supportive member of his family.

His mother liked the poetry, but as a deeply religious person, didn't want him to be a musician. Some of his eight siblings have yet to sit through an entire show of his.

"I think it's hard to have a whacked-out artist in your family. You don't know what to do with them," he said.

The road to Mr. Eaglesmith's version of success remained a tough one.

Despite releasing independent records in his 20s, it wasn't until he was in his 30s he

started gaining popularity.

It was also at that time when Mr. Eaglesmith headed to Nashville, where he signed a publishing deal and got paid to write songs.

"My father was much more enthusiastic after that," he laughed.

Mr. Eaglesmith started touring the United States in the early 1990s and was getting some radio play.

That is where Alan Jackson heard Freight Train. Mr. Jackson covered it and even named his 2010 album after it.

Miranda Lambert had a number of Mr. Eaglesmith's songs given to her to re-record, but she chose a different one — Time to Get a Gun, which appeared on her 2009 album *Revolution*.

Toby Keith had White Rose Filling Station given to him to record and he did. It's on the 2007 release *Big Dog Daddy*.

There are about 100 other covers of Mr. Eaglesmith's songs out there by lesser known artists, he said.

In 1997, Mr. Eaglesmith won a Juno for best solo roots and traditional album - *Drive-In*. He was again nominated in 2009 for best solo roots and traditional album for *Tinderbox*.

Tickets to the all-ages Stouffville show are \$25 in advance from www.fredjeaglesmith.com and \$30 at the door.



HOWARD WEISS PHOTO

Fred Eaglesmith has had songs covered by Alan Jackson and Miranda Lambert. He's playing at the Stouffville Legion Nov. 8.

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