

# Search for classic country music sounding great

**M**y roots go deep in country music — classic country music.

As a born and bred country kid, I grew up with those pickin' people of the 1940s and '50s — folks like Hank Williams, Kitty Wells, Hank Snow, George Jones and Tammy Wynette. Their music was beamed into our home by high-powered radio stations south of the border.

Because of an expanse of several hundred miles, tunes were heard best during evening hours because intensity was strongest. That was cow-milking time when bossy's output also seemed strongest with a Johnny Cash ballad wafting past her ears.

Past my ears, too. Thanks to this, the laborious milking chore was almost enjoyable.

Sadly, since the demise of Richmond Hill's CFGM, these golden oldies are seldom heard. Not in the Stouffville area. They've been replaced by what's known as "new country", a far cry from the storied songs of seven decades ago.

But where there's life, there's hope. Thanks to Stouffville's Mor-



**Roaming Around**  
with Jim Thomas

ley and Marie Ryan, Jean and I are now tuned into a live song-and-dance experience featured every Friday at the Oddfellow's Hall in Brooklin, a half-hour's drive away. The dance bands, some from a distance, are good, so good we never want to miss a night. In reality, we've again been bitten by the bug.

The driving force behind this fun-house frolic is Linda O'Neill, a native of Corner Brook, Newfoundland, but now living in Whitby. At age 17 and fresh out of high school, Linda moved to Toronto. It was while employed as a cashier at an IGA store she met and later

married husband Ron. Mr. O'Neill died suddenly five years ago.

As a teenager, country music was a way of life, she recalls. Ron, a New Brunswick native, loved it too. Together, they travelled the dance circuit mainly in the Barrie area, since their summer cottage was located near Penetang. Later, they would visit the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville as well as Branson, Missouri, another favourite guitar-pickin' spot. The late Conway Twitty remains her choice of country singers.

When an initial dance site in Brooklin closed, Ron sought a replacement. And found it only a short distance away at 42 Bagot St. As with any revitalized venture, early crowds were small, about 40 people. However, word soon spread and dancers responded, some coming from as far away as Peterborough, Lindsay, Bowmanville and, yes, Stouffville. Numbers have since doubled with participants ranging in age from 35 to 95.

Strict rules are in place and rigidly enforced including exclusion of alcohol. "That's one of the stipulations," says Linda, "alcohol isn't

needed to have fun."

"Besides," she adds, "if a car accident occurred because of an inebriated driver, I'd feel guilty. We started this way and this is how it will stay."

Dances begin at 6:30 and conclude at 10:30. A single admission is \$6 plus a voluntary 50-50 draw and a door prize. All bands receive the same basic fee. There's a \$400 monthly hall rental expense.

"Since we began, the price of admission has never changed," says Linda. Should there be a year-end profit, a contribution is made to the Whitby Food Bank. Eight hundred dollars was donated last Christmas.

Is the music format likely to change from classic country to new country? Definitely not, says Linda. At least not as long as she's in charge.

"The people have made it clear, classic country is what they want. If this type of music isn't provided they won't come, simple as that," she states. She also notes there's no shortage of classic country bands in the Brooklin area with eight groups currently available on a regular basis. The band schedule

is planned two months in advance on a weekly rotation system.

Are square and barn dances likely to be included? Insufficient room, says Linda. With tables and chairs arranged around the floor's perimeter, space is limited, she explains.

Throughout the evening an open mic procedure is practised whereby guest, vocalists and instrumentalists are invited on stage. While some are repeat performers, first-time participants are warmly welcomed. And no one goes home hungry. At 8:30 everything comes to a halt while appetites are appeased through a plenteous pot-luck lunch.

Although dancing remains the focus, fellowship is also important, says Linda. Throughout the evening, the hall is alive with conversation, hugs and handshakes.

"The people are wonderful," Linda concludes, "I feel privileged to be as much a part of their lives as they are part of mine."

*Jim Thomas is a Stouffville resident who has written for area newspapers for more than 60 years.*

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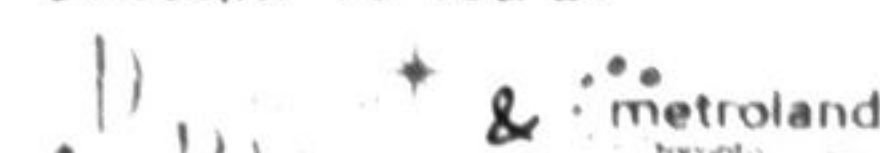
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