

THE RANT AND RAVE GAZETTE

A Music Newsletter

Issue 16

Welcome to the sixteenth issue of the Rant - a 'hero' issue. NOTE: the most recent issue comes up first with past issues following. Cheers!

THE HOKEY POKEY

"AND YOU SHAKE IT ALL ABOUT"



"And again with the shaking"

TONY BRADAN

Mr Guitar

Tony Bradan was a guitarist who came to prominence in Canada in the 1930's and 40's, playing in dance bands from the age of 14, and making a name for himself as guitarist in Mart Kenney's Western Gentlemen, as music director for military orchestras in World War II, and as guitarist for the CBC Toronto orchestra. He married the singer Judy Richards.

Tony taught guitar in Toronto for many years and his students are a who's who of Canadian guitar players. He has been described as 'The father of modern guitar styles in Canada.' He was also a mentor and friend.

I was an odd duck when I met Tony. I had moved to Toronto, following many of my playing compatriots, thinking that I needed to be in a major centre if I was to continue developing as a guitar player and musician.

Thing is, I had already signed the contract at the crossroads - the one that required I move to the Yukon border, build a cabin on the land and all the rest. Still, I took my 18 months in Toronto seriously, gigging, teaching and searching out mentors in the big Canadian apple.

I was accepted to study with Gord Delamont, perhaps Canada's foremost arranger, composer and music theorist at the time. Right after I auditioned, I told him that I'd got myself into a bit of a pickle, and that I had to go and build a cabin in the North before the completion deadline in the fall, and if it was ok with him, I'd come back when I was done. In retrospect, it was a little cheeky.

He stopped, looked at me with raised eyebrows, but then relaxed, shook his head, and smiled, "Alright then, call me when you're ready." I think that just might be the perfect definition of grace.

The delay wasn't without its benefits. You see, at the time, I was a terrible reader. Guitarists of that era coming out of rock, tended to be behind the curve when it came to sight reading on the instrument, and I was no exception.

Poor eyesight, and the disability in my left hand had given me perfectly good excuses to avoid learning how to read well on the guitar, but the time had come to remedy that situation, and the solution to the problem, from all accounts, was to look up Tony Bradan.

Well, that I did. Luckily enough, he accepted me as a student, immediately after which I piped up with ... wait for it ... "There's just one thing. You see I have to build this cabin in ..." And again, the grace: "Ok. Call me when you get back."

Maybe these guys saw the earnestness in my face, or maybe they were just kind hearted folks. Either way, I was determined to not let them down.

Thing is, sometimes you have to grab while the grabbing is good. During the several months I was sawing and whacking logs in the North, two things happened: Tony Bradan decided to retire, and Gord Delamont up and died. 'Carpe Diem,' I guess while the carping is good.

As things turned out though, Tony moved to Richmond B.C. - within hailing distance of where I was reared, and after I was done building, I looked him up to see if the offer was still open. He said,

"Well, I'm retired now but ... what the hell ... why don't you just come on over to the house."

And so it was. Every week for a dozen weeks or so, I showed up at Tony's, and he would reveal his 'process for learning guitar' - much of which was an eye-opener, even for someone who had been playing for a while. He thought like nobody I had ever met. It was thrilling - and we got to know each other pretty well.

After every session, I would offer him tuition money and, every time, he would refuse it. "I'm happy to keep my hand in," he would say. But it was more than that, and we both knew it.

At some point, he revealed that he was putting the final touches on a book he had finished: 'A Learning Process For Playing the Guitar.' He said he wasn't sure how it should be presented and he thought I might have some ideas. He walked over to the file cabinet, slid it open, pulled out the first installment, and dropped it on the desk top. I was astonished. It consisted of a couple of hundred pages of meticulously hand written instructions complete with notation, all on heavy manuscript paper.

"What do you think?" He said.

I leafed through. It was all the stuff he had been teaching over the years - all in one place.

"I think you need to publish this now."

"I don't know where to start," he replied.

"I'll give you a hand," I said. "It needs laying out, and it needs to be typed. If you will trust me with the manuscript, I will set it up for you."

I walked out of there with his first book under my arm, determined to get to a typewriter and photocopying machine as soon as possible. As you may have guessed, this was right on the cusp of P.C.s and word processors, and the only efficient way to set up a book was with a typewriter and photocopier. So type and photocopy I did.

A week or two later, I excitedly handed over the result to Tony - a manuscript he could send off to a publisher. His smile lit up the room. "You're an honourable man," he said to me leafing through the edited version. I'm pretty sure I blushed.

As it turned out, it was only the first edited draft of the work. Another of Tony's students, George Arvola, with new computer publishing skills at his disposal, took on the whole project. As Tony was fond of saying, 'Boy did he ever!'

Six books later, the job was done. George sent me the newly laid out version of the book I had worked on. I was thrilled to see it in finished form.

I stayed in touch with Tony and his wife Judy during the last years of his life. Shortly before he was hospitalized, I sat with him a few times at his bedside, occasionally passing him a little shot of brandy that, he swore, the doctor told him he needed to keep his arteries open. It was a terrible burden he said, but it had to be done.

I visited Judy several times after Tony died. Most of the family was back east as far as I can gather. One day she said,

"I'm clearing some stuff out, and I know Tony would want you to have these."

I left that day with his entire vinyl collection. There are all kinds of gems in there, but no gem quite like like the man himself.

LITTLE GEMS

ADVICE THAT WAS WORTH ITS WEIGHT IN GOLD



"The perception of dissonance decreases as speed increases"

THATS ALL FOR NOW FOLKS! SEE YOU NEXT TIME