

REAL ROCK: AUTHENTICITY AND POPULAR MUSIC IN CANADA, 1984-1994

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Abstract

This dissertation investigates the production and reception of English-Canadian rock music sound recordings, from 1984 to 1994, in relation to mutually constitutive understandings of race, ability, gender, sexuality, class, age, and place. It examines how different forms of domestic Anglo rock served to reinforce or subvert the dominant ideologies undergirding the social order in Canada during the late twentieth century. This study analyzes a multifaceted discourse about authenticity that illustrates the ways in which a host of people – including musicians, music journalists, record label representatives and other professionals from across the music industries, government administrators, and consumers – categorized recorded sound, defined bodily norms, negotiated commerce and technology, and evaluated collective communication in Canada. This study finds that the principle of originality fundamentally structured the categorization of sound recordings in Canada. Originality, according to rock culture, encompassed the balancing of traditionalism with innovation. This dissertation determines that Whiteness organized English-Canadian rock culture in terms of its corporeal standards. White bodies functioned as the norm against which racialized Others were compared and measured. This study also shows how the concept of autonomy encouraged the proper negotiation of commerce and technology in an increasingly neoliberal political and economic condition. Independence of will fostered acceptable behaviour. Finally, this dissertation reveals that the rock status of a given concert rested upon the actions of the performers as well as the composition and reactions of ticket holders in the audience.

To Robert and Rosalba.

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Introduction

In the mid-1980s, New Romantic bands marked the airwaves in Canada with their glossy synthetic sound and flashy androgynous looks – a seemingly perfect combination for the increasingly postmodern cultural condition of the country. By the end of the decade, however, select roots rock groups had ushered in a changing of the guard in English-Canadian rock music. These alternative outfits brandished unadulterated tones and appeared utterly unconcerned with fashionability. The early 1990s marked a period of stylistic fragmentation wherein leading Anglo rock acts in Canada produced an assorted, eclectic range of expressive modes, most of which fell under the broad umbrella of alternative music. A heterogeneous mix of bands that had each recently resided on the margins of domestic rock music now constituted the country's cutting-edge mainstream.

This dissertation explores the production and reception of Anglo rock music in Canada between 1984 and 1994. By means of a multifaceted discourse about authenticity, a host of people – including musicians, music journalists, record label representatives and other professionals from across the music industries, government administrators, and consumers – categorized recorded sound, defined bodily norms, negotiated commerce and technology, and evaluated collective communication. Mutually constitutive understandings of race, ability, gender, sexuality, class, age, and place permeated the discourse about authenticity, forming multiple evolving constellations of intelligibility in and through which a range of musical styles and practices became rock music in Canada. This dissertation finds meaning in the ways in which different forms of popular music served to reinforce or subvert these aforementioned interdependent dominant ideologies.

It employs dialogic criticism to ascertain how certain Canadian sound recording artists arbitrated tensions between co-optation and opposition at a given historical moment.¹ I argue that domestic Anglo rock music functioned as a ground on which Canadians negotiated both social preservation and transformation in the late twentieth century. Rock resulted from an ongoing historical conversation. In this manner, not only did the popular music genre routinely affirm the social hierarchies of the status quo in Canada, it also occasionally served as a potent mode of subversion that stimulated imagined alternatives and fostered change.

This dissertation contributes to the study of Whiteness: the countless social and political processes that secure White bodies and cultures as the norm against which racialized Others are compared and measured.² Several scholars have interrogated the role of Whiteness in United States history.³ A number of other academics have examined it in the Canadian context as well.⁴ Drawing upon that foundational corpus, this

¹ George Lipsitz, *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 102. Building upon the work of literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin, Lipsitz uses the concept of dialogism to show that rock 'n' roll, far from being a mere commercial vulgarization of popular music tradition, re-accentuates elements taken from American folk and blues in order to articulate a new, more urban style of resistance to the imperatives of the dominant North American order.

² The author gleaned this formulation of Whiteness from: Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

³ Some of the leading historical works on Whiteness in the United States include: Alexander Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Verso, 1990); David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso, 1991); Cheryl Harris, "Whiteness as Property," *Harvard Law Review* 106, no. 8 (June 1993): 1707–91; Theodore Allen, *The Invention of the White Race* (New York: Verso, 1994); Theodore Allen, *The Origin of Racial Oppression in Anglo-America* (London: Verso, 1997); Ian Haney-López, *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race* (New York: New York University Press, 2006).

⁴ Some of the most influential studies of Whiteness in Canada include: Sherene Razack, *Looking White People in the Eye: Gender, Race, and Culture in Courtrooms and Classrooms* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998); Himani Bannerji, *The Dark Side of the Nation: Essays on Multiculturalism, Nationalism, and Gender* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 2000); Eva Mackey, *The House of Difference: Cultural Politics and National Identity in Canada* (New York: Routledge, 1999); Sherene Razack, *Dark Threats and White Knights: The Somalia Affair, Peacekeeping, and the New Imperialism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004); Barbara Heron, *Desire for Development: Whiteness, Gender,*

dissertation holds in tension the paradoxical fact that the machinations of Whiteness are ubiquitous yet frequently imperceptible, especially to White people. Still, as interdisciplinary artist Coco Fusco rightfully warned long ago: “To ignore white ethnicity is to redouble its hegemony by naturalizing it.”⁵ In Canada, mainstream domestic rock music often normalized, and privileged, the experiences and understandings of the Anglo White majority. This dissertation argues that Whiteness largely operated as an unarticulated presupposition of rock authenticity. Of central importance, then, are the ways in which race became interlocked with other social hierarchies in historically and contextually specific circumstances. The discourse about authenticity tended to position certain talented, urban, Anglo, heterosexual, middle-class White men as “exalted subjects” that naturally dominated the production and reception of rock music in Canada.⁶ Nevertheless, imagined alternatives to this particular brand of Whiteness existed.

This dissertation closely examines six leading English-Canadian bands: Platinum Blonde, Glass Tiger, Blue Rodeo, Cowboy Junkies, The Tragically Hip, and Barenaked Ladies. It demonstrates how the discourse about authenticity shaped the production and reception of each group’s sound recordings and live performances in Canada. I chose these six particular bands because each one constituted the top-selling rock act in the country at successive points between 1984 and 1994. Clues to the place of rock music in

and the Helping Imperative (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2007); Sunera Thobani, *Exalted Subjects: Studies in the Making of Race and Nation in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007); Sherene Razack, Malinda Smith, and Sunera Thobani, eds., *States of Race: Critical Race Feminism for the 21st Century* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2010).

⁵ Coco Fusco, “Fantasies of Oppositionality,” *Afterimage: The Journal of Media Arts and Cultural Criticism*, December 1988, 9.

⁶ The author borrowed this notion of “exalted subjects” from: Thobani, *Exalted Subjects*, 6. Women, though, did participate in the production and reception of rock music in Canada. As this dissertation shows, Margo Timmins of Cowboy Junkies garnered conditional inclusion as *just* a singer, a subordinate position in rock music culture.

Canadian society rested in the era's hit records, which have over time evolved from entertainment commodities to historical documents. Furthermore, these six groups individually and collectively illustrated the shifting popular music soundscape in Canada during the late twentieth century. Their sound recordings, as such, represented rich cultural texts in and through which the themes of this dissertation could best be examined. Incidentally, every ensemble hailed from the Lake Ontario vicinity, reflecting the region's continued demographic and material dominance of the sound recording industry back then. Dozens of English- and French-language Canadian newspapers and popular music magazines from across the country formed the research base of this dissertation. I decided not to conduct oral interviews of band members because I wanted to study their understandings of the time under investigation from the interviews they gave during that period, rather than from recollections they distilled in the recent past. A close examination of the music press coverage of Platinum Blonde, Glass Tiger, Blue Rodeo, Cowboy Junkies, The Tragically Hip, and Barenaked Ladies revealed that the ideal of authenticity undergirded nearly every aspect of rock music in Canada. This study thoroughly describes that discourse about authenticity and puts it in historical context.

Periodization

This dissertation structured itself around breaks and continuities in the history of English-Canadian rock music between 1984 and 1994, a period I call Early Digital. Despite having a certain degree of arbitrariness, periodization provides a conceptual coherence that serves as a functional necessity for writing about the past, though contingency

always challenges that basic unity.⁷ Early Digital refers to the onset of revolutionary technological innovation in sound recording, distribution, and reproduction during the late twentieth century. It covers a stage when popular music production and reception in Canada started shifting from analogue to digital modes. The Early Digital era contained three imbricated musical epochs: the peak of New Romantic rock between 1984 and 1987; a roots rock revival from 1987 to 1990; and the mainstream breakthrough of alternative rock between 1990 and 1994. Furthermore, the significant late-twentieth-century phenomena of postmodernism and neoliberalism greatly affected all three of these musical epochs.

The term postmodernism bears a literary origin.⁸ Spanish writer Federico de Onis coined *postmodernismo* in 1934, using it to describe an aesthetic pattern in contemporary Hispanic poetry that he thought represented a reactionary regression within modernism. Almost twenty years later, American poet Charles Olson revived the term, gave it an affirmative spin, and introduced it to the United States and Canada. Olson started describing the mid-twentieth century as a postmodern age in which lyrical innovation could foster a future beyond capitalism. His notion of postmodernism, however, did not acquire wider diffusion in the literary world until 1972, when William Spanos launched *boundary 2: Journal of Postmodern Literature and Culture* and the legacy of Olson resurfaced. By the end of the 1970s, the concept of postmodernism had spread to other fields of study. Architectural historian Charles Jencks argued in *The Language of Post-*

⁷ As literary critic J. Hillis Miller pointed out long ago: “Periods differ from one another because they are different forms of heterogeneity, not because each period held a single coherent ‘view of the world.’” J. Hillis Miller, “Deconstructing the Deconstructors,” *Diacritics* 5 (1975): 231. In this excerpt, Miller quoted from Joseph Riddel’s *The Inverted Bell*, a book he deconstructed for the article.

⁸ The history of the term postmodernism put forward in this paragraph is heavily indebted to one book: Perry Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity* (New York: Verso, 1998).

modern Architecture that technological shifts had spawned a new phase in building design marked by a “double coding,” the addition of another set of messages to the modern style, which appealed to both popular sensibility and educated taste.⁹ Jean-François Lyotard’s *La Condition Postmoderne*, published in 1979, constituted the first philosophical work to develop the idea of postmodernism. For Lyotard, a general incredulity toward the master narratives of the European Enlightenment tradition comprised the defining trait of postmodernity.¹⁰ Nevertheless, *La Condition Postmoderne*, albeit innovative, only covered the state of knowledge in the sciences, leaving aside the whole spectrum of the arts and politics. During the 1980s and early 1990s, countless academics and critics offered competing and often contradictory understandings of postmodernism, fiercely debating its purview, its origin, its outbreak, its value, its politics, and even its actuality.¹¹ Some of the theories put forward by Fredric Jameson back then still hold tremendous explanatory power. Inspired by the scholarship of Ernest Mandel and Jean Baudrillard, Jameson posited postmodernism as a social category: a culturally dominant yet varied set of structural and institutional processes wherein people understood certain sensibilities, styles, and outlooks as reactions and responses to new living conditions and specific historical-geographical circumstances.¹²

This dissertation treats postmodernism as an aesthetic and technological cultural condition that first emerged in the United States during the 1940s and spread to Canada

⁹ Charles Jencks, *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture* (London: Academy Editions, 1991).

¹⁰ Jean-François Lyotard, *La Condition Postmoderne: Rapport Sur Le Savoir* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1979).

¹¹ Brian McHale, *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodernism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 5.

¹² Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991). The author garnered this understanding of Jameson's work from: Cornel West, “Black Culture and Postmodernism,” in *A Postmodern Reader*, ed. Joseph P. Natoli and Linda Hutcheon (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 390–97.

soon thereafter. Postmodern culture featured a range of defining artistic properties, none more important than pastiche and intertextuality. Pastiche involved the identification and imitation of a particular series of stylistic components during the production of a brand new creation. Intertextuality referred to the inclusion of some elements from a previous cultural text within a current one, usually through the practice of quotation, allusion, or allegory. Cultural theorist John Storey, and other scholars, correctly pointed out that pastiche and intertextuality featured prominently in modern popular culture.¹³ Yet, in addition to the preponderance of these aesthetic forms, postmodernism represented a technological package without precedent.¹⁴ This dissertation asserts that television inaugurated the postmodern epoch in Canada during the early postwar period. The unparalleled electronic reproduction device fostered a hyper-reality in which the clear distinction between a real event and its media representation increasingly wavered. At the same time, pastiche and intertextuality distinguished commercial television broadcasts in Canada. For example, in the 1950s and 1960s, American and Canadian variety programs pastiched cultural conventions and combined intertextual fragments taken from vaudeville, as well as radio comedy and drama.¹⁵ By 1966, when colour television reached households in Canada for the first time, the habit of viewing the small screen had penetrated deeply into the everyday routines of people across the country.

Sound recording represented yet another aesthetic and technological arena in which postmodernism emerged as a cultural dominant. Since its invention, sound

¹³ John Storey, "Postmodernism and Popular Culture," in *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*, ed. Stuart Sim (New York: Routledge, 2011), 204–14. The author also found this argument in another work: David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1989).

¹⁴ Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity*, 122.

¹⁵ Paul Rutherford, *When Television Was Young: Primetime Canada 1952 - 1967* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 188-226.

recording dedicated itself to the faithful rendering of musical events: records represented actual live performances. Soon after the Second World War, however, some popular music producers in the United States started embracing artifice in the studio and began crafting records that presented listeners with an “aural fantasy.”¹⁶ This reimagining of contemporary American song writing and expressive direction, known eventually as rock ‘n’ roll, recognized the transformative effects of both musical genre crossover and state-of-the-art sound recording technology. Rock ‘n’ roll music exemplified postmodern culture, in large part, through its reliance on pastiche and intertextuality. Recording teams forged conspicuous collages of divergent performance styles. Musicologist Albin Zak explained: “Rock and roll songs happily bore vestigial features of their source influences – R&B, country, pop ballad, novelty, blues, and so forth – but in the hands of rock and roll songwriters the sources were deconstructed and their elements recycled as pastiches of found object.”¹⁷ Spawned from the absorption, revision, and fusion of disparate influences, rock ‘n’ roll turned the studio itself into a compositional tool. As a result, the material form of sound recordings became the chief frame of musical reference for a generation of young musicians in the United States and Canada. Intertextuality, then, proved integral to the foundation and development of rock ‘n’ roll. Moreover, by positioning aural fantasy as a marker of authenticity, this postmodern approach to record making blurred the line between artificiality and reality. In the mid-1960s, when rock surfaced as a full-fledged musical genre, its budding practitioners, who had grown up on fifties rock ‘n’ roll, adopted the consensus that sound comprised the basic medium of

¹⁶ Albin Zak, *I Don't Sound Like Nobody: Remaking Music in 1950s America* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 6.

¹⁷ Zak, *I Don't Sound Like Nobody*, 192.

musical meaning.¹⁸ Rock pioneers embraced pastiche as they mined the musical styles of years past to construct incorporated musical works in the recording studio. Albums, as opposed to singles, formed the basic paradigm of rock music.¹⁹ LPs represented models of creativity for musicians to emulate and consumers to appreciate, establishing the inter-textual nature of the genre. Furthermore, cutting-edge multitrack recording methods afforded rock producers, and musicians, the ability to take aural fantasy to spectacular new heights, obliterating any remaining distinction between simulated and actual performance in sound recording.

Music videos epitomized postmodern culture in the late twentieth century.²⁰ Rock musicians had always recognized the importance of image. Whether by way of album covers, promotional photographs, or myriad public appearances, each and every performer conveyed strong messages about their identity through visual cues. Music video enhanced and intensified the image-creating abilities available to sound recording artists. The unique creative medium quickly became an indispensable publicity tool during the 1980s, when MuchMusic and other music video-based television programming started playing a significant role in defining the meaning of a newly minted rock song and determining its commercial success in Canada. Music videos clearly qualified as postmodern cultural products. They shattered temporal organization into disjointed moments of intensity, exhibiting the intensive fragmentation at the heart of postmodernism. Moreover, by featuring exceedingly stylized musicians pretending to

¹⁸ Zak, *I Don't Sound Like Nobody*, 237.

¹⁹ Theodore Gracyk, *I Wanna Be Me: Rock Music and the Politics of Identity*, Sound Matters (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 70–71.

²⁰ Other scholars have made this argument at length, see: E. Ann Kaplan, *Rocking Around the Clock: Music Television, Postmodernism, and Consumer Culture* (New York: Methuen, 1987); and Andrew Goodwin, *Dancing in the Distraction Factory: Music Television and Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992).

play their latest songs, often in fantastic locales, all in an effort to garner fame and sell their own records, these performance simulations vanquished the difference between reality and representation.²¹ Music videos also functioned as extended advertisements that conflated commerce and artistry, highlighting the profound relationship between capitalism and postmodern culture.

This dissertation follows the innovative lead of Fredric Jameson and anchors postmodernism in the alterations of the economic order of capital.²² Capitalism is a highly elastic and adaptable mode of production. Marxist economist Ernest Mandel convincingly argued that three distinct phases organized the development of this restless commercial system: (1) freely competitive capitalism, which emerged from the eighteenth-century industrial revolution in Europe and involved the growth of isolated domestic markets; (2) monopoly capitalism, which lasted from about 1850 to 1940, featured the imperialistic cultivation of international markets and the exploitation of colonial territories; (3) late capitalism, which materialized after the Second World War and continues on in our own time, witnessed the dismantling of the imperial economic order and the institution of globalized markets dominated by multinational corporations and the fluidity of financial capital.²³ Technological innovation and the invention of radically new types of commodities helped fuel the remarkable postwar growth of late capitalism in the United States and Canada. Postmodernism signalled the extension of the power of market forces over a whole range of recently developed cultural products.

²¹ The author gleaned this formulation from: Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 2. Music videos, following Baudrillard's understanding of postmodernism, qualified as an order of simulacra.

²² This dissertation, however, differs with Jameson's periodization for the onset of postmodernism. Jameson placed the emergence of postmodern culture sometime in the early 1970s, whereas I argue it first surfaced in the 1940s. Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 47.

²³ Ernest Mandel, *Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1999).

Television and rock music, as such, deeply reflected the underlying logic of the late capitalist system in and through which they had arisen.

During the three decades following the Second World War, late capitalism delivered spectacular economic growth rates, high wages, low inflation, as well as unprecedented levels of material well-being and social security in Canada. This golden age of welfare state capitalism ground to a halt in the 1970s. Oil shocks nearly quadrupled the price of petrol overnight, runaway inflation and rising unemployment struck simultaneously, and corporate profits fell precipitously, altogether causing unprecedented calamities for the Canadian postwar economic order.²⁴ In response, a number of socially and politically influential people in Canada advocated reviving the old self-regulating market doctrine of classical liberalism under the novel conditions of late capitalist globalization. These so-called neoliberals blamed crippling government regulation, exorbitant public spending, and high tariff barriers to international trade for impeding successful industrial economic development. They sought nothing less than a complete reorientation of Canada's fiscal outlook and administration. This dissertation conceptualizes neoliberalism as a tripartite manifestation: an ideology, a mode of governance, and a policy package. Neoliberal ideological claims advanced a global economic interdependence rooted in the free and unregulated operations of late capitalism, supporting a shift away from Keynesian theory.²⁵ The second facet of neoliberalism refers to what the French theorist Michel Foucault called "governmentalities"; certain modes of governance based on particular premises, logic,

²⁴ Manfred B Steger and Ravi K Roy, *Neoliberalism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 36.

²⁵ Cory Blad, *Neoliberalism and National Culture: State-Building and Legitimacy in Canada and Québec* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2013), 24.

and power relations.²⁶ Entrepreneurial values such as competitiveness, self-interest, and decentralization have characterized neoliberal governmentality. They have furnished a public administration model that redefined citizens as customers or clients, and encouraged civil servants to cultivate innovation and enhance productivity.²⁷ Lastly, in terms of neoliberal policy packages, specific courses of action varied according to national context, though deregulation of the economy, privatization of state-owned enterprises, and liberalization of trade all formed cornerstones.

In Canada, the neoliberal turn began in earnest with the landslide election victory of the Progressive Conservative Party, led by Brian Mulroney, in September 1984. “Canada is open for business again,” Mulroney proudly declared months later, during a speech to several hundred American executives and investors at an Economic Club of New York dinner, garnering the loudest ovation of the evening.²⁸ The Prime Minister made clear that his government would assist the United States private sector in creating new wealth north of the forty-ninth parallel. The first major structural change undertaken by the Mulroney administration involved the deregulation of the Canadian energy market. To that end, in 1985, the Progressive Conservative government abolished the National Energy Program and transformed the protectionist Foreign Investment Review Agency into a more market-friendly Investment Canada. Since the late nineteenth century, the prevailing federal policy had been to shield Canada’s energy sector from the potentially destructive impact of economic penetration from beyond, particularly from the United

²⁶ Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-78*, ed. Michel Senellart, François Ewald, and Alessandro Fontana, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). Foucault’s central concern in these lectures is with the overarching problem of governmentality. He examines how governing happens and how it is conceived.

²⁷ Steger and Roy, *Neoliberalism*, 39.

²⁸ Jamie Murphy, “Canada: Hanging Out the Welcome Sign,” *Time*, 24 December 1984.

States. The neoliberal policies of the Mulroney period definitively reversed this long-standing approach. In the mid-1980s, Prime Minister Mulroney also appointed a minister of state for privatization, who oversaw the sale of several crown corporations, including Air Canada and Petro-Canada. Still, the landmark Free Trade Agreement with the United States constitutes the most significant neoliberal legacy left by the Mulroney administration.²⁹

The prospect of trade liberalization threatened to overwhelm Canada with the economic and cultural power of its colossal neighbour to the south. In 1985, when talks on creating a regional free trade zone with the United States started, Prime Minister Brian Mulroney repeatedly reassured Canadians that his government would protect the nation's security interests at the bargaining table.³⁰ The Progressive Conservative administration framed the conclusion of a free trade agreement with the United States as the only way to impose some order and predictability on the sometimes turbulent yet most vital Canadian-American economic relationship. Advocates for the culture industries in Canada voiced fears that trade liberalization with the United States would spell the end of domestic cultural production and, therefore, the demise of Canada as an independent country. Mulroney, though, appreciated the importance of creative artistic expression to the formation of Canadian national identity, especially in age of increasing globalization. On 4 December 1985, the Prime Minister explained Canada's position regarding cultural

²⁹ The recounting of the Canadian government's neoliberal policies under the leadership of Brian Mulroney in this paragraph is heavily indebted to one book: Jonathan Swartz, *Constructing Neoliberalism: Economic Transformation in Anglo-American Democracies*, 2013, <http://www.deslibris.ca/ID/446588>.

³⁰ James M. Pitsula, "The Mulroney Government and Canadian Cultural Policy," in *Transforming the Nation: Canada and Brian Mulroney*, ed. Raymond Benjamin Blake (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007).

safeguards and trade liberalization to a high-profile Speakers Forum at the University of Chicago:

When it comes to discussing better trade rules for cultural industries, you will have to understand that what we call cultural sovereignty is as vital to our national life as political sovereignty. And how could it be otherwise living, as we do, next to a country ten times our size in population...If we and our American partners cannot strike a deal that will achieve these goals, a deal will not be struck.³¹

Mulroney vowed his administration would protect Canada's culture industries during trade negotiations with the United States government. The two countries ultimately reached a deal in October 1987. Canadian cultural production remained protected, albeit at a cost, as Canada conceded the legitimacy of counter-measures by the United States of equivalent commercial effect.³² By the early 1990s, as this dissertation shows, the economic and political condition of neo-liberalization, in conjunction with an intensifying Canadian constitutional crisis, had spawned a demand within Canada for domestic rock music laced with ideologically charged national identifiers. Up until then, home grown sound recording artists tended to strip their rock music of Canadian national identifiers in order to maximize sales in foreign markets, the location of truly significant profits.³³ In retrospect, trade liberalization fostered market opportunities for Canadian artists, facilitating the expanded production and consumption of domestic sound recordings in Canada. Between 1989 and 1994, sales of Canadian recording artists in Canada increased by an astonishing 255%.³⁴ The ardent discourse surrounding the

³¹ Brian Mulroney, *Memoirs: 1939-1993* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2007), 410-411.

³² G. Bruce Doern and Brian W. Tomlin, *Faith & Fear: The Free Trade Story* (Toronto: Stoddart, 1991), 97.

³³ Ryan Edwardson, *Canadian Content: Culture and the Quest for Nationhood* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 21.

³⁴ In the 1989-1990 fiscal year, sales of recordings with Canadian content reached \$36,300,000. By 1993-1994, that figure had soared to \$92,700,000. The total market share in Canada for Canadian content sound

neoliberal Free Trade Agreement seemed to have greatly affected the spending habits of Canadian consumers.

Neoliberalism obsessively reinforced the notion of individual consumer interest, breaking with previous less self-centred formulations of consumerism in North America.³⁵ It fostered a distinct understanding of individual empowerment by extending the category of the consumer into other non-traditional fields, such as politics, education, and healthcare. Neoliberal practitioners emphasized competitiveness as well as the liberty of personal and customized consumer choice, not only regarding commercially available products but also with respect to lifestyles, modes of expression, and a wide range of cultural practices.³⁶ Moreover, under the leadership of Brian Mulroney and the Progressive Conservative party, Canadian political culture valorized and celebrated the entrepreneurial individual. Neoliberalism appeared rhetorically gender-neutral in this regard. Yet, as gender theorist R.W. Connell made clear, though neoliberals may have understood individuality without recourse to gender ideology, people routinely coded the desired attributes of entrepreneurs – competitiveness, ruthlessness, profit orientation – as masculine, and, in point of fact, men overwhelmingly filled these autonomous business roles in Canadian society.³⁷

This dissertation contends that neoliberalism amplified the cultural condition of postmodernism in Canada during the 1980s and early 1990s. For, although postmodernism initially emerged after the Second World War, the Mulroney era

recordings jumped from 8% to 12.6% during the same period. Statistics Canada, *Sound Recording: Culture Statistics*. Ottawa: 87-F0008XPE.

³⁵ Historian Lizabeth Cohen argued that neoliberalism transmogrified the postwar ideal of the purchaser as citizen in the United States. Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2004).

³⁶ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 42.

³⁷ R. W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 255.

witnessed the first widespread illumination of it across the country. That is, as the years passed, more and more Canadians became aware of an intensifying, profound aesthetic and technological shift already long underway. Historical geographer David Harvey explained the connection between the rise of neoliberalism and the flourishing of postmodernism:

Neoliberalization required both politically and economically the construction of a neoliberal market-based populist culture of differentiated consumerism and individual libertarianism. As such it proved more than a little compatible with that cultural impulse called 'postmodernism' which had long been lurking in the wings but could now emerge full-blown as both a cultural and intellectual dominant.³⁸

Neoliberalism constituted a unique incarnation of late capitalism marked by the increasing commodification and industrialization of ever more sectors of society in Canada. Postmodern culture thrived in the 1980s and early 1990s under these unprecedented political and economic conditions. The aesthetic and technological qualities of postmodernism resonated in the neoliberal orbit.

The year 1994 marked the close of the Early Digital period. Alternative rock music had left the margins and now formed the mainstream in Canada, bringing to a close that latest cycle of musical innovation. Plus, in July 1994, the Moving Picture Experts Group released its MP3 coding format for digital audio to the public, allowing users to play digital audio computer files and share them online. This technological innovation profoundly altered the nature and character of the relationship between the Canadian music industry and both the economy and consumers. Powered by the Internet, record companies would soon distribute sound recording products without physical form directly to customers through electronic media. In hindsight, MP3 technology represented the

³⁸ Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 42.

beginning of another distinct phase of the Digital era, a stage in which postmodernism and neoliberalism only quickened.³⁹

A Sense of Place

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, as the economic and political condition of neoliberalism intensified and the cultural condition of postmodernism flourished, Canadians looked to a sense of place for stability in an increasingly uncertain new world order. This dissertation, therefore, interrogates the idea of place. Much has been written about the concept before and after Yi-fu Tuan defined it in the 1970s, yet that geographer's description remains one of the most clear and concise: "What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with meaning."⁴⁰ Place, then, is a pure social construct. People forge understandings of particular spaces. Philosopher Edward Casey contended that place constitutes a fundamental form of embodied experience, the site of a powerful fusion of self, space, and time.⁴¹ The term "sense of place" refers to the affective dimension of a person's relationship with somewhere they have lived, visited, or only just imagined. Accordingly, as geographer Doreen Massey emphasized, every place does not have a single, essential,

³⁹ Jeffrey Nealon argued that there has been an intensification of postmodern capitalism since the 1980s. See: Jeffrey T. Nealon, *Post-Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Just-in-Time Capitalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012).

⁴⁰ Yi-fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 16. In the 1970s, geographers such as Yi-Fu Tuan and Edward Relph built up a humanistic approach to understanding place. They drew upon the philosophical tradition of phenomenology, which focused on the daily, lived experience of the world, and considered what place meant to people.

⁴¹ Edward S. Casey, "How to Get from Space to Place in a Fairly Short Stretch of Time: Phenomenological Prolegomena," in *Senses of Place*, ed. Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1996), 13-52.

identity that people realize.⁴² Rather, individuals and groups hold different, often contradictory, perspectives on the same place. They each create, reproduce, and defend their own sense of place. Furthermore, in the late twentieth century, people who advocated for the Canadian nation-building project tended to promote the affixation of stable meanings to domestic locales.⁴³ Transforming space into place, as such, encompassed a complex and contested process. This dissertation highlights that process in Canada from 1984 to 1994 through its examination of the discourse about authenticity.

Authenticity Emerges

The ideal of authenticity surfaced in Europe during the eighteenth century as burgeoning urban, industrial societies there reflected on the tumultuous times befalling them. Literary critic Lionel Trilling examined this profound response to the onset of modernity in *Sincerity and Authenticity*, his foundational treatise on the subject, published in 1972. Trilling determined that the distinction between an inner true self and an outer false self, a differentiation which scholars argued emerged in Western culture during the late 1700s, had to exist for the notion of authenticity to arise. Highly influential writings by Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Johann Gottfried Herder articulated an early modern vision of authenticity that rested on the direct correspondence between an autonomous person's inner condition and the external expression of that state, especially in art. Each individual had an original way of being that required communication afresh. Authenticity resulted from contacting one's own inner nature and giving unmediated expression of it in speech

⁴² Doreen B. Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 152–53.

⁴³ Brian S. Osborne, "Landscapes, Memory, Monuments, and Commemoration: Putting Identity in Its Place," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 33, no. 3 (2001): 41-45.

and through action. Little surprise, then, that artistic creation became venerated as the paradigmatic mode of self-definition in modernity. The quest for authenticity operated as a countervailing force to the sweeping alienation that resulted from living in progressively secular, capitalist societies built upon the primacy of liberal individualism. This historical background is what gave moral force to the ideal of authenticity.⁴⁴

At the turn of the twentieth century, the concept of authenticity experienced a distinctively anti-modern reformulation. In *No Place of Grace*, a seminal study of *fin-de-siècle* American culture, T. J. Jackson Lears unravelled the social and psychic tensions of leading antimodernists who sought supposedly authentic alternatives – physical, emotional, or spiritual – to the apparent insincerity of modern existence. Those alternatives, oddly enough, evolved into commodities ready for consumption. While turning away from modernity, these antimodernists actually helped usher it in.⁴⁵ Lears demonstrated how anti-modernism hinged on the ideal of authenticity. Karl Hagstrom Miller’s recent study of American popular music during the age of Jim Crow, *Segregating Sound*, connected this anti-modern impulse to the way in which race, music, and the market became increasingly viewed through a newly formed folkloric lens. “Folklore located authenticity in isolation from modern life and modern media,” Miller pointed out.⁴⁶ The nascent field of folklore studies argued that genuine music emanated outside of the commercial sphere and expressed intrinsic racial characteristics.

⁴⁴ The outline for the emergence of authenticity detailed in this paragraph is gleaned primarily from one book: Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).

⁴⁵ T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 300.

⁴⁶ Karl Hagstrom Miller, *Segregating Sound: Inventing Folk and Pop Music in the Age of Jim Crow* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 5–6.

Authenticity formed the means by which an emergent colour line reduced southern music into a series of distinct genres marked by racial and ethnic identities.

Antimodernist constructions of authenticity rooted in Canada near the end of the nineteenth century. In *Authentic Indians*, Paige Raibmon examined how a variety of non-Indigenous people deployed definitions of “Indian-ness” in turn-of-the-century coastal British Columbia that undermined the claims of Indigenous peoples there to resources, land, and sovereignty. Raibmon discovered White settlers only ascribed authenticity to Indigenous expressions that bolstered colonial rule. In the covetous eyes of these alabaster immigrants, “real Indians” constituted a dying breed, a noble vestige of the pre-modern past. “Only the vanishing had legitimate claims to land and sovereignty; surviving modernity disqualified one from these claims,” Raibmon wrote. “Either way, colonizers got the land.”⁴⁷ Binary terms of authenticity created a powerful Catch-22 for Indigenous survival under colonialism. Canadian antimodernists also located authenticity in the White rural population of Nova Scotia, during the early decades of the twentieth century. Ian McKay’s *The Quest of the Folk* outlined the ways in which middle-class urban antimodernists, Helen Creighton among the most famous of them, took it upon themselves to defend the cultural authenticity of Maritime “Folk” traditions from the corrosive effect of modernity. Nevertheless, as they devised a regional identity that McKay defined as Innocence, folklorists reinvigorated elite dominance of Nova Scotia society through “a modernizing anti-modernism,” a contradictory practice in which the

⁴⁷ Paige Sylvia Raibmon, *Authentic Indians: Episodes of Encounter from the Late-Nineteenth-Century Northwest Coast* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 9.

conservation of authentic traditional “Folk” culture necessitated its commodification.⁴⁸

This reactionary understanding of authenticity soon spread to many other places in Canada. The National Museum embraced the collection of folk materials, universities began to offer professional folklore instruction programs, and state cultural policy started reflecting a folkloric paradigm.

During the late 1920s and early 1930s, Canadian government policy planners began treating culture as a realm in need of protection from the modern commercial world. The growing popularity of American mass culture within Canada alarmed them in particular. They feared it would ruin the unique character of the country’s people. The Royal Commission on Radio Broadcasting and subsequent establishment of the publicly owned Canadian Broadcasting Corporation formed part of a nationalist response that exemplified a folkloric understanding of cultural authenticity. Historian Mary Vipond argued that the Aird Commission introduced a new conception of broadcasting to the public forum, an “idealist” vision which suggested that radio comprised more than simply a business matter, it also functioned as a cultural medium that serviced Canadian national interests.⁴⁹ Multiple strains of cultural nationalism bolstered this turn toward federal government intervention. Canada had deep historical roots as a pluralized state, and common understandings of its national identity widely varied. Canadians gave multiple, fluid, and contradictory meanings to Canada. After the bitter French-English confrontation that punctuated the First World War, Québécois nationalists gravitated toward a view that commemorated and championed the resilience of the only French and

⁴⁸ McKay’s formulation here obviously echoes T.J. Jackson Lears’ take on the American anti-modernism movement. Ian McKay, *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1994), 25.

⁴⁹ Mary Vipond, *Listening In: The First Decade of Canadian Broadcasting, 1922-1932* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1992).

Catholic society in North America.⁵⁰ French Canadian artists drew from the past to fashion a distinct culture, drawing clear lines between the so-called two solitudes. English Canadians, meanwhile, largely perceived Canada as either an essentially British nation or as an unmistakable North American entity.⁵¹ Anglo cultural production reflected these antagonistic outlooks.

During the inter-war period, the conditional, elusive nature of authenticity in the age of mechanical reproduction challenged Canadian national cultural policy makers. Walter Benjamin's famous 1936 essay on the matter ably captured the critical tenor. "Precisely because authenticity is not reproducible, the intensive penetration of certain (mechanical) processes of reproduction was instrumental in differentiating and grading authenticity," he figured.⁵² Benjamin argued that art became authentic retroactively. Authenticity now constituted an artefact of reproducibility.⁵³ Using film as a vehicle of analysis, Benjamin revealed how mechanical reproduction had transformed the practice of artistic production and, in the process, the notion of originality. In short, by converting culture into a mass commodity, the age of mechanical reproduction spawned a crisis of authenticity, one that continued to intensify as the twentieth century unfolded.

In 1951, the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters, and Sciences – known as the Massey Commission, after its chair, Vincent Massey –

⁵⁰ Alan Gordon, "Lest We Forget: Two Solitudes in War and Memory," in *Canadas of the Mind: The Making and Unmaking of Canadian Nationalisms in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Norman Hillmer and Adam Chapnick (Montreal: McGill-Queens's University Press, 2007), 159–73.

⁵¹ Margaret E. Prang, "Nationalism in Canada's First Century," *Historical Papers* 3, no. 1 (1968): 114–25; Marlene Shore, "'Overtures of an Era Being Born' F.R. Scott: Cultural Nationalism and Social Criticism 1925-1939," *The Journal of Canadian Studies* 15, no. 4 (1980): 31–42.

⁵² Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 243.

⁵³ The author gleaned this reading of Walter Benjamin's take on authenticity from: Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 220.

proposed a deliberate and coordinated strategy for state-sponsored cultural development informed by an elitist anglophilic nationalism.⁵⁴ The formation of the Canada Council, a federally connected arts-funding body meant to encourage the growth of domestic artists, especially those based in European high-culture traditions, centred this strategy and acted as a counterweight to the dire threat posed by American mass-produced commercial entertainment. The Massey Report upheld a condescending White highbrow vision of Canadian culture for the 1950s in which genuine “Indian arts” endured only as “shadows of a dead society.”⁵⁵ Driven by the desire to thwart the ills of industrialization while maintaining a rigid racial and ethnic hierarchy of artistic expression, the Massey Commission ushered in a new era of state-supported cultural development empowered by a folkloric understanding of authenticity.

Two major strands of cultural nationalism flourished in Canada during the 1960s. Powerful Anglo White people who felt progressively vulnerable to American economic and cultural expansionism formed one strand. Members of the English-Canadian nationalist intelligentsia adopted a new middlebrow approach with the public that promoted an enlightened common culture free from Yankee commercial dominance.⁵⁶ Their message resonated with many a Canadian as the country celebrated its Centennial anniversary and hosted Expo 67. Nevertheless, at the same time, the other major strand of

⁵⁴ Paul Litt, *The Muses, the Masses, and the Massey Commission* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992).

⁵⁵ The relevant passage from “Chapter XV: Indian Arts and Crafts” of the Massey Report reads in full: “The impact of the white man with his more advanced civilization and his infinitely superior techniques resulted in the gradual destruction of the Indian way of life. The Indian arts thus survive only as ghosts or shadows of a dead society. They can never, it is said, regain real form or substance. Indians with creative talent should therefore develop it as other Canadians do, and should receive every encouragement for this purpose; but Indian art as such cannot be revived.” Canada, *Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters, and Sciences Report* (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1951), 240.

⁵⁶ Leonard B. Kuffert, *A Great Duty: Canadian Responses to Modern Life and Mass Culture, 1939-1967*, Carleton Library Series 199 (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003).

cultural nationalism thriving in Canada, a heterogeneous Québécois patriotism, threatened to dismantle the entire federalist project. The Quiet Revolution had radically transformed society in *la belle province*, allowing for an up-and-coming middle class there to implement the idea of “*maîtres chez nous*” extensively. In order to counter the growing appeal of Québécois separatism, the recently elected federal government led by Pierre Trudeau implemented an agenda that positioned the success of domestic cultural industries as central to the formation of a bilingual and multicultural nationalist framework.⁵⁷ State intervention turned civil servants into keepers of genuine Canadian culture. This substantial shift in governmental policy instituted far-reaching effects on the sound recording industry in Canada and fastened a nationalistic component to the ideal of authenticity.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, when a discernible rock press emerged in the United States, leading music journalists there drew heavily upon folklore’s notion of authenticity to sustain their aesthetic critiques, which, in turn, laid the foundation for an ideology and mythology of rock.⁵⁸ Critics heralded musical authenticity as a remedy for the alienation wrought by modern industrial capitalism and the dissimulation on which it relied. In Canada, a baby-boom generation, unparalleled in size, came of age in a society that gave it a distinct and important position.⁵⁹ Still, in music, dress, and attitudes, this formidable younger generation seemed increasingly unwilling to accept adult values. The

⁵⁷ Edwardson, *Canadian Content*, 18.

⁵⁸ The author observed this point in three works: Marion Leonard, *Gender in the Music Industry: Rock, Discourse, and Girl Power* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2007); Keir Keightley, “Reconsidering Rock,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Pop and Rock*, ed. Simon Frith, Will Straw, and John Street (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 109–42; Robert Christgau, “A History of Rock Criticism,” in *Reporting the Arts II: News Coverage of Arts and Culture in America* (New York: National Arts Journalism Program at Columbia University, 2004), 140–43.

⁵⁹ Doug Owsram, *Born at the Right Time: A History of the Baby-Boom Generation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996).

so-called youth rebellion found affiliation with rock. Each claimed a seriousness that distinguished them from both the adult mainstream and teen subcultures.⁶⁰ Rock music provided a vital means for middle-class Canadian youth to establish sincere feelings of community with one another, keeping the existential anxieties of modernity at bay, if only temporarily. It also became identified with the detection and development of a real self. “Rock authenticity posits an absolute dichotomy between the inner and the outer, between the true self and the socially constructed mask,” philosopher Theodore Gracyk concluded in his study of the genre.⁶¹ Rock culture organized itself around the ideal of authenticity. Dismayed with the adult world of artificial simulations and mass mediation, middle-class young people searched for reality in an interior psychic space. Rock music, at its best, supposedly helped guide youths on that decidedly modern metaphysical quest.

Defining Rock Authenticity

Popular music researchers have attempted to account for the numerous different ways in which authentication manifests by subdividing the concept of authenticity. Lawrence Grossberg, Johan Fornäs, and Allan Moore all suggested, each from vastly diverse vantage points, a tripartite model.⁶² Regarding rock authenticity in particular, Keir Keightley distinguished between two major strands, whereas Hans Weisethaunet and Ulf

⁶⁰ Keightley, “Reconsidering Rock,” 123.

⁶¹ Theodore Gracyk, *Rhythm and Noise: An Aesthetics of Rock* (London: Tauris, 1996), 226. Gracyk analyzes rock as an art form in the liberal tradition, loosely basing his argument upon the later writings of philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein.

⁶² Lawrence Grossberg divided authenticity along three broad generic threads: rock/folk, dance, and avant-garde. Lawrence Grossberg, “The Media Economy of Rock Culture: Cinema, Post-Modernity and Authenticity,” in *Sound & Vision: The Music Video Reader*, ed. Lawrence Grossberg, Simon Frith, and Andrew Goodwin (New York: Routledge, 1993), 185–209; Johan Fornäs, *Cultural Theory and Late Modernity* (London: Sage Publications, 1995); Allan Moore, “Authenticity as Authentication,” *Popular Music* 21, no. 2 (1 May 2002): 209–23.

Lindberg proposed at least six contrasting ideas.⁶³ This dissertation, on the other hand, partitions rock authenticity into four distinct yet overlapping and interpenetrating pieces: sonic authenticity, embodied authenticity, folkloric authenticity, and communal authenticity. Furthermore, inspired by the work of French theorist Michel Foucault, this dissertation holds that people in Canada ascribed rock authenticity to musical sounds and the bodies that made and consumed them through written and oral discourses.⁶⁴ The discourse about authenticity generated knowledge of rock music in Canada by creating constellations of intelligibility that shaped perceptions, produced meanings, and organized behaviours. At the same time, this dissertation also incorporates historian George Lipsitz's notion of dialogic criticism into its theoretical framework to account for both the preservation and transformation of the social order in Canada. Rock music authenticity spawned from an ongoing historical conversation in which Canadians affirmed or subverted various interdependent dominant ideologies.

This dissertation maintains that certain people enjoyed the power to produce effects in the discourse about authenticity. First, and perhaps foremost, ranked music journalists. Depending on their professional stature and corporate affiliation, critics assigned themselves the aesthetic sanction to define what constituted authenticity. Select musicians, unique in their ability to operate on musical and linguistic planes, earned the

⁶³ Keir Keightley argued that rock discourse contained two kinds of authenticity: Romantic authenticity and Modernist authenticity. Keightley, "Reconsidering Rock"; Hans Weisethaunet and Ulf Lindberg, "Authenticity Revisited: The Rock Critic and the Changing Real," *Popular Music and Society* 33, no. 4 (October 2010): 465–85.

⁶⁴ This dissertation's sense of discourse is a patchwork of ideas garnered from several influential texts by Michel Foucault, including: Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972); Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973); Michel Foucault, "History of Systems of Thought," in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1977), 199–204; Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990).

authority to determine authenticity. Record label executives and other professionals from across the music industries who enjoyed positions of influence participated in the ascription of authenticity as well. Government administrators of the culture industries also engaged in the discourse of authenticity for regulatory and nationalist purposes. Lastly, despite lacking ties to socially embedded networks of power, consumers formed a vital assorted constituency that produced effects in the discourse of authenticity mostly through patterns of consumption. This heterogeneous mixture of people discursively established the truth about rock music in Canada by citing the standard of values and ideological assumptions that underpinned sonic authenticity, embodied authenticity, folkloric authenticity, and communal authenticity. What follows is a brief introduction to each of these four versatile, mutually constitutive categories of authenticity.

The Discourse of Sonic Authenticity

Regimes of Whiteness and racial segregation have informed sound recording from its inception. In the late nineteenth century, when companies first issued sound recordings as a commodity in Canada, American-based businesses accounted for nearly all of the recorded music sales in the fledgling nation state.⁶⁵ Canadians displayed a voracious appetite for records as sound reproduction techniques advanced in the early twentieth century. Between 1910 and 1919, sales of recorded music hardware and software

⁶⁵ The North American Phonograph Company, owned by inventor Thomas Edison, issued the first catalogue of records in 1890. All of the selections it offered comprised instrumental pieces. In the early twentieth century, American companies accounted for up to ninety-seven per cent of all music sales in Canada. Edward B Moogk, *Roll Back the Years: History of Canadian Recorded Sound and Its Legacy (Genesis to 1930)* (Ottawa: National Library of Canada, 1975), 12.

increased more than sixfold.⁶⁶ Record company catalogues listed all their products in one place to court consumers with broad musical tastes. This business practice changed in the 1920s, though, as the market became segmented along racial lines. Labels launched “race” and “old-time” genre categories, each with its own catalogue and promotional material.⁶⁷ “The emergent musical color line eventually brought the logic of segregation into the realm of sound and style,” historian Karl Hagstrom Miller argued, “linking sonic signifiers of race to the corporeal bodies and physical landscapes that Jim Crow already had been trying to contain for several decades.”⁶⁸ Record companies now organized themselves according to a folkloric understanding of authenticity, which stipulated that genuine music expressed essential racial characteristics: White people made White music, Black people made Black music, and so on. The following decade saw the establishment of major broadcasting networks with an integrated star system that marked a significant shift in the industrialization of sound recordings. “It was in the 1930s that the ‘popularity’ of music came to be measured (and thus defined) by record sales figures and radio plays,” socio-musicologist Simon Frith concluded.⁶⁹ The leading music trade magazine, *Billboard*, adopted racialized charts in the 1940s. Whereas the “Harlem Hit Parade,” “Race,” and, eventually, “Rhythm and Blues” charts primarily traced the popularity of Black musicians, the pop mainstream remained chiefly the domain of White artists. Recorded music markets in Canada and America catered to and fostered regimes

⁶⁶ In 1910, sound recording hardware and software sales in Canada totalled \$342,278 USD. By 1919, sales totalled \$2,186,680 USD. Moogk, *Roll Back the Years*, 43, 75.

⁶⁷ Miller, *Segregating Sound*, 188. Race records largely encompassed what would later be called blues, gospel, and jazz music. Old-time records, on the other hand, represented mostly what would become known as country music.

⁶⁸ Miller, *Segregating Sound*, 15.

⁶⁹ Simon Frith, “The Industrialization of Popular Music,” in *Popular Music and Communication*, ed. James Lull, Sage Focus Editions 89 (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1987), 61.

of Whiteness and racial segregation. Consumer tastes, however, proved unpredictable and soon made this racialized sound recording system volatile.

Defence production for the Second World War attracted millions of Black and White rural people to industrial centres across the United States. Cultural interactions between these urban working-class communities spawned a turbulent musical style that eventually captured the attention of Canadian teenagers in the 1950s. African American artists who worked with independent labels – Little Richard, Ruth Brown, Bo Diddley, Etta James, and Chuck Berry, among others – originated this fresh sound. According to the racial logic of the sound recording system, their musical material should have appealed to Black audiences alone. When White youngsters gravitated toward this unfamiliar musical form, it became packaged as “rock ‘n’ roll.” The new genre’s astonishing crossover appeal took the sound recording industries by surprise and caused a moral panic among socially conservative White people.⁷⁰ The major labels responded by trying to invent new White middle-class stars such as Tommy Sands, Tab Hunter, and Pat Boone. RCA Records signed Elvis Presley and polished his controversial style for mass distribution, leaving behind the broader musical culture from which he sprung. Rock ‘n’ roll became redefined as a White male cultural production.

In the mid-1960s, rock emerged as a distinct genre category in the recorded music market alongside a rock press that, among many things, ascribed sonic authenticity to the

⁷⁰ Music anthropologist Maureen Mahon argued: “The moral panic around rock ‘n’ roll – the threat of juvenile delinquency, unleashed sexuality, and the loss of good American values – stemmed from a fear of African American culture.” Maureen Mahon, *Right to Rock: The Black Rock Coalition and the Cultural Politics of Race* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 153. Class constituted a critical factor in the emergence and reception of rock ‘n’ roll as well. For critical analysis of rock ‘n’ roll’s class dimension, see: Michael James Roberts, *Tell Tchaikovsky the News: Rock “N” Roll, the Labor Question, and the Musicians’ Union, 1942-1968* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

fledgling form.⁷¹ By 1974, rock critic had become a recognized career occupation in the music industries of the United States and Canada.⁷² The blooming profession attracted an assortment of scribes, though the most influential rock critics in this formative period represented youthful, educated, White, men who tended to universalize their particular experience of recorded music in their critiques.⁷³ No set craft rules existed to start out with. “Nevertheless, canons of artistic quality, critical vocabulary, historical overview and cultural commitment quickly asserted themselves,” renowned music journalist Robert Christgau explained. “The aesthetic was hell on pretension and in love with authenticity, excitement and the shock of the new.”⁷⁴ In other words, after some significant debate, critics cultivated a discourse of sonic authenticity to ascertain what characterized real rock music.

Music journalists forged a conventional rock history narrative in these early years that has operated as a foundational mythology. Rock ‘n’ roll, so the story went, constituted a rambunctious creation, born of the blues and country, that nearly perished before the Beatles heroically transformed the genre into a high art form.⁷⁵ Trimming the title down to rock signified this remarkable metamorphosis. That traditional narrative, albeit a highly selective simplification of events, is instructive in a number of ways. To

⁷¹ Some publications which constituted that rock press included daily newspapers such as the *San Francisco Chronicle*, weeklies like the *Village Voice*, and magazines such as *Crawdaddy!*, *Rolling Stone*, and *CREEM*, to name but a few.

⁷² Indeed, by 1974, rock criticism had turned into such a famous profession that legendary music journalist Lester Bangs decided to write a satirical piece about becoming one. See: Lester Bangs, “How to Be a Rock Critic,” in *Rock History Reader*, ed. Theo Cateforis (New York: Routledge, 2012), 139–47.

⁷³ Daphne A. Brooks, “The Write to Rock: Racial Mythologies, Feminist Theory, and the Pleasures of Rock Music Criticism,” *Women and Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture* 12 (2008): 54–62; Mark Fenster, “Consumers’ Guides: The Political Economy of the Music Press and the Democracy of Critical Discourse,” in *Pop Music and the Press*, ed. Steve Jones (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002), 81–92.

⁷⁴ Christgau, “A History of Rock Criticism,” 142.

⁷⁵ Christgau, “A History of Rock Criticism”; Keightley, “Reconsidering Rock.” 117.

begin with, the tale adhered to a folklore paradigm in which rural cultures originally produced racially and ethnically distinct music in isolation before the commercial processes of modernity amalgamated them. The popular narrative credited White men with establishing the genre of rock, which seems rather significant. For, more than any other musical category, rock initially relied on the blues for the provision of authenticity.⁷⁶ From nineteenth-century-minstrelsy to the whitewashing of rock ‘n’ roll music, the practice of White musicians imitating stereotypical understandings of Black performance has a long and sordid history in both the United States and Canada. The blues revivalism that powered rock’s formation continued this appropriative routine.⁷⁷ Another noteworthy aspect of rock’s foundational mythology is its claim to serious art status. Rock, unlike other forms of popular music that simply disseminated juvenile entertainment through faddish hit singles, represented a mature cultural expression that treated entire albums as lasting integrated musical works.⁷⁸ Critics celebrated the Beatles as pioneers of this monumental shift in recorded sound production. By gendering the historical narrative in this manner, music journalists erased the countless contributions women made to the genre, perpetuating the strong association of rock music with the experiences and understandings of White heterosexual men of a certain age. The discourse of sonic authenticity generated concrete implications. Sociologist Mavis Bayton found that, from the late 1970s to the mid 1990s, people actively discouraged

⁷⁶ Mahon, *Right to Rock*; Jason Toynbee, *Making Popular Music: Musicians, Creativity and Institutions* (London: Oxford University Press, 2000); Keightley, “Reconsidering Rock.”

⁷⁷ White people did not represent all rock practitioners at this time. Trailblazing guitarist Jimi Hendrix, for instance, who happened to be mixed race, led rock production until his premature death in 1970. Still, as a revered non-White rock musician, Hendrix proved anomalous.

⁷⁸ Zak, *I Don’t Sound Like Nobody: Remaking Music in 1950s America*, 238.

women from becoming popular music instrumentalists, leading to a chronic gender imbalance among rock performers.⁷⁹

In the late 1960s, when rock emerged as a musical genre with an accompanying critical discourse, the Canadian state grappled with its dual colonial legacy. Separatism had been gaining appeal among the *Canadien* population of Québec, threatening the cohesion of Canada. The recently elected federal government, under the leadership of Pierre Trudeau, positioned the success of domestic cultural industries as integral to the formation of a bilingual and multicultural nationalist framework.⁸⁰ This significant administrative policy shift spawned the Canadian Radio and Television Commission, Canadian content quotas for media broadcasters, and new grant programs for local artists and companies. Most importantly, it wove the criterion of place into the discourse of sonic authenticity taking shape in Canada at the time.

The next major reorientation of Canadian state policy regarding the culture industries began in 1984, when the neoliberal turn began in earnest with the landslide election victory of the Progressive Conservative Party led by Brian Mulroney. Facilitation of a Free Trade Agreement with the United States sat atop the agenda for the new administration. Economic protectionism had regularly furnished the Canadian federal government with much of the legitimacy it required to exercise authority.⁸¹ Still, within a context of capitalist market globalization, and facing extensive American

⁷⁹ Mavis Bayton, *Frock Rock: Women Performing Popular Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Sheila Whiteley, *Women and Popular Music: Sexuality, Identity, and Subjectivity* (New York: Routledge, 2000); Leonard, *Gender in the Music Industry*; Susan Fast, “Girls! Rock Your Boys: The Continuing (Non)History of Women in Rock Music,” in *History/Herstory: Alternative Musikgeschichten*, ed. Annette Kreuziger-Herr and Katrin Losleben (Köln, Germany: Böhlau Verlag, 2008), 154–76; Lucy O’Brien, *She Bop: The Definitive History of Women in Popular Music* (London: Jawbone, 2012).

⁸⁰ Edwardson, *Canadian Content: Culture and the Quest for Nationhood*, 18.

⁸¹ Blad, *Neoliberalism and National Culture*, 5.

cultural imperialism, Canadian state actors realized that, as increasingly key tools for affirming national identity and sovereignty, cultural products needed protection.

Canadian government officials ostensibly kept the culture industries off the table during free trade negotiations with the United States.⁸² By the turn of the 1980s, the political and economic condition of neoliberalism had profoundly intensified the importance of displaying a sense of place within the discourse of sonic authenticity. Many influential music journalists wholeheartedly embraced the idea that genuine rock music in Canada exhibited a distinct national quality or character.

By means of the discourse of sonic authenticity, a host of people categorized sound recordings in Canada between 1984 and 1994, determining which ones actually qualified as rock music. Record company executives routinely participated in the discourse of sonic authenticity as they organized the production, distribution, and promotion of sound recordings according to pre-determined genre categories.⁸³

Assignment of a particular recording to a specific genre dictated how it would be developed and marketed. Influential music journalists, by dint of their critical prestige and readership demographic, developed the aesthetic sanction to ascribe sonic authenticity in their album reviews, feature articles, and other publications. As part of their professional practice, Canadian critics would often conduct interviews with musicians promoting their latest recording. These interviews constituted rhetorical performances through which music journalists and recording artists negotiated the

⁸² American state negotiators insisted that Canada's protection of its culture industries constituted unfair trade practice and used that supposed infraction as a bartering chip. Ryan Edwardson argues that this tactic made cultural industries part of the deal, despite the promises of Canadian state actors. Edwardson, *Canadian Content*, 257.

⁸³ On the importance of genre categories to the corporate structure of record companies, see: Keith Negus, *Music Genres and Corporate Cultures* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 47.

categorization of sound recordings.⁸⁴ Real rock music status in Canada required that recorded sound align with the tenets of the discourse of sonic authenticity.

The discourse of sonic authenticity contained several components. Sounding original proved fundamental: each rock group had to express something of its own, each band had to be true to itself. Favoured records in this regard balanced innovation with traditionalism by pushing the current creative musical envelope while simultaneously, through the practices of pastiche and intertextuality, cultivating a connection to rock's golden past without being too formulaic or overly derivative, which would violate sonic authenticity. Vocals mattered greatly. Lyrical content and its sincere expression formed essential aspects of the discourse of sonic authenticity. Prized lyrics displayed an intelligence and seriousness worthy of rock's high art pretensions. Concurrently, vocal lines had to be delivered honestly for them to receive commendation. "No emotion seems beyond the pale," philosopher Theodore Gracyk concluded in his treatise on rock music. "But faked emotion is."⁸⁵ The principle of originality structured virtually every aspect of the postmodern cultural form. The discourse of sonic authenticity covered all these musical elements to distinguish which sound recordings on the Canadian market represented real rock music.

The Discourse of Embodied Authenticity

There is no human body. There is, rather, an abundance of human bodies. In Canada, as in much of Western society, people have traditionally treated "the body" as a corporeal

⁸⁴ The author developed this conception of music press interviews as rhetorical performances from Glenn T Pillsbury, *Damage Incorporated: Metallica and the Production of Musical Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2006), xviii.

⁸⁵ Gracyk, *Rhythm and Noise*, 224.

universal, a relatively immutable exhaustive model. They have conceived this axiomatic bodily norm, at least implicitly, as able, masculine, heterosexual, White, middle-class, youthful, and a citizen.⁸⁶ Counter to such mistaken essentialism, this dissertation enriches its theoretical framework with the insights of philosophers Elizabeth Grosz and Judith Butler to arrange a conception of embodiment that accounts for the differential production of corporeality. Bodies constitute an open materiality subject to systems of inscription through which myriad social and cultural messages become woven into flesh.⁸⁷ The material specificity and historical context of each corporeal surface, however, necessitates the degree to which every message is inculcated. Systems of inscription marked all kinds of bodies in Canada throughout the Early Digital era. Discourse provides the only means to access the sign-laden materiality of those diverse bodies.⁸⁸

The discourse of embodied authenticity defined bodily norms in Canadian society by representing bodies pictorially and by describing them in precise detail. Bodies emerged as modern symbols of identity in the 1840s. Posed photographic portraits, largely informed by European portrait painting traditions, became increasingly popular and convenient back then.⁸⁹ Stylized images of bodies proliferated in subsequent decades as consumer advertising saturated the popular press with photographs of youthful,

⁸⁶ For historical examples of this powerful bodily norm, see: Mary-Ellen Kelm, *Colonizing Bodies: Aboriginal Health and Healing in British Columbia, 1900-50* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1998); Wendy Mitchinson, *The Nature of Their Bodies: Women and Their Doctors in Victorian Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991).

⁸⁷ The phrase “open materiality” is how philosopher Elizabeth Grosz described the biological dimension of sexual difference. E. A. Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 191.

⁸⁸ Judith Butler makes the primacy of discourse clear in her discussion on the negotiation of sexual difference: “We may seek to return to matter as prior to discourse to ground our claims about sexual difference, only to discover that matter is fully sedimented with discourses on sex and sexuality that prefigure and constrain the uses to which that term is put.” Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 29.

⁸⁹ Mike Featherstone, “Body, Image and Affect in Consumer Culture,” *Body & Society* 16, no. 1 (2010): 214.

beautiful, healthy-looking people. By 1910, a cinema star system had emerged in the United States, spawning the “picture personality.”⁹⁰ Record companies followed Hollywood’s lead and started using glossy photos of recording artists to promote sales of their cultural products. In the postwar period, record label marketing departments honed the use of photography to create and reinforce narratives for musicians they sponsored. Pictorial representations of bodies intensified the importance of bodily appearance as a resource on which to gain fame and fortune, setting ideals of embodiment that effectively excluded or marginalized bodies that did not approximate those exceptional corporeal archetypes.⁹¹ Precise descriptions of bodies accompanied the rise of photographic media in Canada. Discourse maintained bodies. “It is by being interpellated within the terms of language that a certain social existence of the body first becomes possible,” philosopher Judith Butler noted.⁹² Consumerist attitudes toward embodiment and comportment found continual expression throughout the mass media and became inculcated within the matrix of identity formation. The spectacular rise of satellite cable television music video channels only heightened the relevance of visual appearance in Canadian society during the 1980s and early 1990s.⁹³

The discourse of embodied authenticity defined bodily norms that determined which performers genuinely embodied rock music in Canada during the Early Digital era.

⁹⁰ Richard deCordova, “The Emergence of the Star System in America,” in *Stardom: Industry of Desire*, ed. Christine Gledhill (New York: Routledge, 1991), 17–29.

⁹¹ George McKay, *Shakin’ All over: Popular Music and Disability* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013), 3.

⁹² Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 5.

⁹³ “Music video is ultimately a vaudevillian scheme where the figure is foregrounded against a static background,” communication scholar Carol Vernallis argued. “Compensatory techniques obscure this scheme through partial views, a wandering camera, abrupt editing, postproduction techniques, and so forth. These techniques reaffirm the primacy of the body, however.” Carol Vernallis, *Experiencing Music Video: Aesthetics and Cultural Context* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 97.

As a rule, favoured bodies proved fully able.⁹⁴ Singing and/or playing an instrument required intricate and highly specialized forms of corporeal discipline that took years to develop. Musical talent, in point of fact, indicated *extraordinary* bodily ability.⁹⁵ Male bodies that displayed masculine gender signs received preference in rock culture. On rare occasion, people granted approval to female bodies presenting feminine gender markings, albeit conditionally.⁹⁶ Chosen bodies exhibited normative sexuality. Granted, hedonism formed a core tenet of rock ideology, but it regularly found expression along heterosexually contingent lines. Furthermore, White bodies enjoyed prototypical status. Most Canadians understood rock music as a White cultural production best practiced by musicians who visibly embodied the racialized genre's sounds. The racist reception afforded Eagle Feather in the late 1980s highlighted the continued presence of a colour line in Canadian popular music.⁹⁷ Prized bodies also looked blue-collar, often despite their actual social status, because of the influence of a middle-class bohemianism that idolized working-class values.⁹⁸ Sporting a proletarian image reflected the embodiment of class in cultural terms rather than in socio-economic ones, since most rock

⁹⁴ Blind singer-guitarist Jeff Healey constituted a notable exception to this rule during the period of study. Healey led a rather successful blues-rock ensemble that garnered critical acclaim while charting a number of hit singles in Canada between 1989 and 1994. The connection between the blues and visually impaired bodies has a long history in popular music culture and may have contributed to Healey finding acceptance in mainstream audiences. For more on this phenomenon, see: Terry Rowden, *The Songs of Blind Folk: African American Musicians and the Cultures of Blindness* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009).

⁹⁵ According to the 1992 General Social Survey, just eighteen per cent of Canadians over fifteen years of age played or practiced a musical instrument. Statistics Canada, *Canada's Culture, Heritage and Identity: A Statistical Perspective*. Ottawa: 87-211, 17.

⁹⁶ Rock culture normally permitted women as singers but discouraged them as instrumentalists, where significant access to social power resided.

⁹⁷ Music journalist Alan Cochrane reported in 1990: "When they first got together about two years ago, Eagle Feather was branded by the misconception that all Indians are trouble makers, untrustworthy and unable to play rock and roll." Alan Cochrane, "Indian Band Overcomes Myths: Eagle Feather Strives to Convey Positive Image of Native Culture," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 11 December 1990, sec. Entertainment.

⁹⁸ The roots of this bohemianism stretched back to when rock emerged as a distinct genre category in the mid-1960s. David Simonelli, *Working Class Heroes: Rock Music and British Society in the 1960s and 1970s* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2013), 97.

practitioners traditionally came from middle-class backgrounds.⁹⁹ In addition, youthful bodies received idolization, as if younger people alone made real rock music in Canada. Finally, the discourse of embodied authenticity praised fit bodies, whose energy, drive, and vitality represented not only their worthiness as rockers in a music video-oriented age, it measured their value as healthy Canadian citizens.¹⁰⁰ Historically specific constellations of intelligibility established a low tolerance for bodies that differed from any of these corporeal models when performing rock music in Canada. In so doing, the discourse of embodied authenticity bolstered an inequitable Canadian social order during the late twentieth century.

The Discourse of Folkloric Authenticity

“The quest for authenticity is a peculiar longing, at once modern and anti-modern,” ethnologist Regina Bendix observed in her examination of folklore studies. “It is oriented toward the recovery of an essence whose loss has been realized only through modernity, and whose recovery is feasible only through methods and sentiments created in modernity.”¹⁰¹ The incessant advance of a modern consumer culture in Canada during the *fin de siècle* challenged traditional social norms and unhinged long held, firmly grounded beliefs. In an age when everything solid melted into air, many a person sought out authentic musical experiences to mitigate the deceptive and alienating aspects of modern

⁹⁹ Keith Negus, *Producing Pop: Culture and Conflict in the Popular Music Industry* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 57.

¹⁰⁰ The expenditure reduction efforts of Canadian government officials helped generate the fitness craze of the 1980s. For instance, Fitness Canada, a federal government agency established in 1979 to increase citizen participation in physical activity, encouraged body maintenance mostly in hope of reducing the state’s health care costs.

¹⁰¹ Regina Bendix, *In Search of Authenticity: The Formation of Folklore Studies* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 8.

industrial capitalism.¹⁰² Paradoxically, people progressively encountered the ideal of authenticity in the twentieth century through the consumption of mass-produced sound recordings, goods created with cutting-edge technologies. At the same time, academic folklore provided a primary intellectual framework for defining musical authenticity in Canada.

Folklore studies rooted in Canada unevenly between the 1860s and the 1940s. French-Canadians along the Saint Lawrence River began gathering regional songs in the early nineteenth century. A few even published collections for commercial sale. Later on, when the Montréal vicinity emerged as a modern industrial centre, these compilations started to include some folklore studies for the first time. Ernest Gagnon's comprehensive *Chansons populaires du Canada*, for example, featured commentary on each song and a concluding essay in which he postulated that rural *Canadien* music expressed essential racial characteristics.¹⁰³ His interpretation appeared largely informed by racist music theory from France and a local burgeoning movement of *Canadien* nationalism. Folklore studies distinguished people within Canada according to fixed racialized classifications. The inaugural report of the Canadian Folklore Society, issued three years after the organization formed in 1908, listed five types of folk: "the various Indian tribes"; "the Eskimo"; "the native-born Canadians of English, Scotch, Irish, Welsh, French, or German extraction"; "the thousands of foreigners, of many nationalities, who annually come to this country"; and "the descendants of Negro refugees from the United

¹⁰² The author derived the phrase "everything solid melted into air" from the title of Marshall Berman's seminal work on modernity, Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1988). which itself constituted a line taken from the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* by Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx.

¹⁰³ Ernest Gagnon, *Chansons populaires du Canada* (Québec: Le Foyer canadien, 1865), 326–327.

States.”¹⁰⁴ Whiteness organized the folklore studies paradigm in Canada. Only people with northwest European ancestry qualified as “Canadians.” The folklore paradigm elided all class differences. Race and heritage claimed paramouncy. Several White folklorists spent the opening decades of the twentieth century collecting, preserving, and publishing “native-born” Canadian folk songs. Most of their attention, however, focused on the Charlevoix region of Québec and the Nova Scotia countryside.¹⁰⁵ Preservation provided a key motivating factor for them. Folklore studies framed modernity as a menace that transformed traditional cultures. As a consequence, authentic folk songs needed gathering before the persistent spread of urban industrialism tainted them. Nearly all folklorists saw no harm in publishing collections of folk songs in print and then, eventually, via sound recordings. Canadian folklorists believed that commercial dissemination could not sully these verifiably authentic tunes. Ironically enough, despite the decidedly anti-modern bent of folklore studies, the concept of folkloric authenticity effectively bolstered the commodification and popularization of records in Canada.

Folk surfaced as a distinct music genre category after the Second World War.¹⁰⁶ For a brief time, in the 1960s, it experienced widespread appeal among young people in Canada. Charming, dynamic performers – such as Pete Seeger, Joan Baez, Gordon

¹⁰⁴ Canadian Folk-Lore Society, *Canadian Folk-Lore Society: First Annual Report* (Toronto: The Society, 1911); Edith Fowke, *Canadian Folklore* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988).

¹⁰⁵ For a remarkable exploration of the work of Marius Barbeau, Luc Lacourcière, and Félix-Antoine Savard in Québec, see: Serge Gauthier, *Charlevoix, Ou, La création d'une région folklorique: étude du discours de folkloristes québécois, 1916-1980* (Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 2006). W. Roy Mackenzie and J.M. Gibbons collected many a ballad in Nova Scotia. They inspired Helen Creighton to do the same. Historian Ian McKay covers her influential career in *The Quest of the Folk*. Some other folklorists spent considerable time collecting folk songs from the British colony of Newfoundland in the first half of the twentieth century. These tunes later became part of the Canadian folk canon when Newfoundland joined Canada in 1949.

¹⁰⁶ For a historical account of “folk” music’s rise in the United States, see: Ronald D. Cohen, *Rainbow Quest: The Folk Music Revival and American Society, 1940-1970* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002).

Lightfoot, Buffy Sainte-Marie, Leonard Cohen, Joni Mitchell, and Bob Dylan – drew upon several musical styles, both current and traditional, to deliver acoustic sounds with politically progressive messages and intimately introspective themes. Canadian folklorists generally viewed folk music in this period as a wholly modern musical practice.¹⁰⁷ Nonetheless, debate over what represented real folk music reached a head in 1965, when leading songwriter Bob Dylan went electric on *Bringing It All Back Home*. This innovative LP pushed the boundaries of folk into the emergent terrain of rock. It also demonstrated the degree to which echoing Black performance remained an essential ingredient of Whiteness in Anglo-America. Because Dylan managed to repudiate any hint of commercial intent while embracing advanced technology in the service of White music, he exemplified a folkloric authenticity that became relished in rock discourse.

Rock constituted an enormous, high-tech industry from the outset. The nascent mass-mediated genre helped generate billions of dollars in annual record sales worldwide during the 1960s and 1970s.¹⁰⁸ Demographics partly explain rock's initial popularity: it enjoyed extensive appeal among people younger than twenty-five years of age, who accounted for almost half of the total population of the United States and Canada back then.¹⁰⁹ Nevertheless, the folklore studies paradigm that rock adopted vilified modern commerce as the nemesis of genuine music. Rock practitioners and pundits increasingly needed to explain how rock could boast such commercial success yet still encompass authenticity. The discourse of folkloric authenticity satisfied that demand by setting guidelines for recording artists to appropriately negotiate the world of business and

¹⁰⁷ Fowke, *Canadian Folklore*, 57–58.

¹⁰⁸ Frith, "The Industrialization of Popular Music," 68.

¹⁰⁹ Of course, this so-called baby boomer generation represented a demographic deviation. Keightley, "Reconsidering Rock," 125.

mechanization. Since the production of rock relied upon significant financing and the employment of particular technologies, people ascribed folkloric authenticity to recording artists in Canada if they properly navigated these perpetual concerns.

During the Early Digital period, the discourse of folkloric authenticity repeatedly positioned autonomy as the ultimate criterion for mediating modern industrial capitalism in Canada. Self-determination formed the measuring stick for properly negotiating commerce and technology while creating rock music. Favoured performers displayed an independence from external control when dealing with sound recording technology, most often in a professional studio setting, by exerting creative freedom during the production process. People often labelled recording artists who failed to meet this exacting standard as a sell-out or worse. Simply put, the discourse of folkloric authenticity revolved around the command of sound on recordings. Making a rock album of international quality in a state-of-the-art recording studio easily cost hundreds of thousands of dollars. Terribly expensive recording space and technology had to be rented for extended periods. Pricey producers and engineers needed to be hired to operate the sophisticated equipment and help performers craft commercially appealing tracks. Record labels commonly carried these expenditures, hoping to recoup them from sales of the finished product. Under such demanding conditions, only autonomous recording artists could withstand these great economic pressures and create honest, genuine musical sound. If self-directed performers achieved monetary success, then it would be reward for their veritable talent and not for some kind of sonic trickery. The discourse of folkloric authenticity associated individual autonomy with upright behaviour and artistic creativity in the studio. It treated rock music in Canada as a realm best separated from, or even set in opposition to, the modern

commercial sphere. In a perfect expression of paradox, this countercultural moral ideal actually functioned to endorse the capitalist and technological practices of favoured Canadian rock music recording artists. Behind these appeals to autonomy laid the normalization of neo-liberalization.

The Discourse of Communal Authenticity

From the Canadian Pacific Railway to the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, the Trans-Canada Highway to the Anik satellite series, the construction of extensive communication systems has featured prominently in Canadian nation building.

Communications proved instrumental to this archipelago of former French and British imperial possessions as it asserted and expanded dominion over an array of different Indigenous peoples during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Fuelled by the politics of modern civilizational hierarchies and guided by the economics of international industrial capitalism, the Canadian state violently instituted a Eurocentric paradigm throughout its territorial reaches, marrying the ideational to the material.¹¹⁰ Establishing and maintaining a cohesive national identity, however, proved rather difficult. The Canadian population found itself dispersed in distant urban and rural communities, fragmented by unequal regional development and disparate capital accumulation, and marked by significant ethnic and racial divisions. Meanwhile, the overwhelming influence the United States exerted, especially in and through telecommunications, constantly threatened to displace Canadian cultural productions. Torn between the tenets of liberalism and the necessities of nationalism, Canadian state planners opted for a

¹¹⁰ This Eurocentric paradigm already existed in some areas, owing to the heritage of French and British settler colonialisms.

mixture of both private and public ownership of communication systems, with the latter acting as a bulwark against the former.

Freeways functioned as arteries of communication for Canada. They wove numerous widely separate municipalities into a web of pavement. In 1971, when workers finally completed the TransCanada Highway, automotive travel across the Canadian dominion, from the shores of the Pacific Ocean to the banks of the Atlantic Ocean, became a year-round possibility. Realization of a national highway network came at a time when Canadian state administrators pressed domestic cultural industries to contribute to the development of national unity. The Trans-Canada Highway greatly enhanced personal mobility, allowing for a national music scene to surface slowly but surely in the 1970s as touring options for local performers expanded hugely. Newly enacted Canadian content quotas for radio broadcasters also facilitated the creation of this national music scene.¹¹¹ Increased airplay of Canadian recording artists led to more mass media coverage of them, which in turn generated greater investment in domestic acts by the major foreign-controlled sound recording companies. Canadian rock music performers, in particular, played to audiences across the country with greater ease and effectiveness than ever before. These concerts constituted rich sites of collective communication where people could put a sense of place into dialogue and even foster community.

The term “live” did not become a part of music appreciation vocabulary until the mid 1930s, nearly fifty years after the advent of viable commercial sound recording

¹¹¹ Historian Ryan Edwardson maintained that Canadian content regulations promoted the development of a national music scene. Ryan Edwardson, *Canuck Rock: A History of Canadian Popular Music* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 213. The Canadian Radio and Television Commission (CRTC) legislated a thirty per cent content quota for AM-band radio as of 1971. The CRTC extended the quota to FM-band radio in 1975.

technologies. Live music, as opposed to recorded music, emerged as a concept during a serious inter-war labour struggle in Canada and the United States.¹¹² The increasingly mechanical reproduction of music threatened the livelihoods of most professional musicians. In response, the bi-national American Federation of Musicians mounted a long-lasting and far-reaching public relations campaign that positioned live performance as the authentic source of music, in stark contrast to so-called canned recordings. Eventually, in the 1960s, rock culture adopted this belief in the power of live-ness. At the same time, though, records formed the basic paradigm of rock music: albums modelled creativity for musicians to emulate and consumers to appreciate.¹¹³ Yet, despite that ingrained convention, enthusiasts still envisioned rock as a performing art. People demanded live shows for a host of reasons, none more important than the desire to establish community. Although the ideal of authenticity built upon earlier forms of individualism pioneered by thinkers such as Rene Descartes and John Locke, it took inspiration from Romanticism, which repudiated disengaged rationality and political atomism that did not recognize the ties of community.¹¹⁴ At the end of the third quarter of the twentieth century, the discourse of communal authenticity appraised collective communication at rock music shows in Canada. Favoured performances gathered Canadians in a fellowship that provided participants with a genuine sense of belonging. The terms of association, nevertheless, varied according to historical moment and audience complexion, yet the importance of (re) establishing community remained integral to the ideal of authenticity in Canada.

¹¹² For a well-detailed history of this protracted labour struggle, see: James P Kraft, *Stage to Studio: Musicians and the Sound Revolution, 1890-1950* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003).

¹¹³ Theodore Gracyk, *I Wanna Be Me: Rock Music and the Politics of Identity*, 71.

¹¹⁴ Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 25.

From 1984 to 1994, through the discourse of communal authenticity, music journalists monitored live performances for collective communication to determine if the show qualified as rock music in Canada. Concerts transpired all over the country in a wide range of venues.¹¹⁵ The discourse of communal authenticity focused critical attention on both performers and audiences, albeit for different reasons. Stage presentation mattered. Powerful lights illuminated the bodies of performers in extraordinary ways, magnifying the importance of visual appearance accordingly. People expected bands to demonstrate musical competency. Studio technology enabled the manipulation of sound to the point of distorting performance. So, by exhibiting dexterity in rock live on stage, recording artists verified their instrumental and vocal virtuosity.¹¹⁶ Finally, a quality performer formed an immediate and palpable relationship with the crowd, whose size, composition, and behaviour attracted significant discursive attention. The discourse of communal authenticity held that real rock music performances appealed predominantly, though not exclusively, to young heterosexual White men. If a band truly rocked live and the right ticket holders attended, then authentic collective communication ensued. The Romantic battle against the alienation of modernity continued unabated.

What Follows

This dissertation is divided chronologically into five chapters.

Chapter One covers the peak of New Romanticism in Canada during the mid-1980s and demonstrates how a multifaceted discourse about authenticity regulated the

¹¹⁵ Between 1984 and 1994, Canadians hosted rock music shows in local bars and restaurants, seated concert halls and auditoriums, parks and amphitheatres, as well as large sports arenas and coliseums sometimes.

¹¹⁶ Ironically enough, people often equated musical talent with an ability to replicate live the sonic standards of Canadian rock music records.

sound recordings and live performances of Platinum Blonde and Glass Tiger, as well as the bodies that created and consumed them. It contends that the Canadian New Romantic movement reflected a distinctly postmodern cultural condition. The chapter finds the ascription of authenticity often required people to adhere to norms and practices that served to underpin a hetero-patriarchal social order in Canada.

Chapter Two recounts the onset of a roots rock revival in Canada from 1987 to 1989, paying specific attention to the rise of three prominent bands within that diverse alternative movement – Blue Rodeo, The Tragically Hip, and Cowboy Junkies – as well as the fall of Platinum Blonde from the rarefied commercial heights of the New Romantic trend. The chapter traces both continuity and change within the discourse about authenticity. The roots rock revival brought issues of race to the forefront, modifying the parameters for deliberating genuineness, and revealing the construction of Whiteness in the process.

Chapter Three details a changing of the guard in domestic Anglo rock music at the turn of the 1980s, when alternative roots rockers Blue Rodeo, The Tragically Hip, and Cowboy Junkies released a batch of influential LPs. All three bands shared a commitment to sonic fidelity in the recording studio and a nonchalant attitude toward cultivating image and celebrity. The chapter outlines how expressing a sense of place became a serious factor in the ascription of authenticity during this tumultuous period in Canada. It suggests that the political and economic condition of neoliberalism, especially the implementation of a Free Trade Agreement with the United States, fostered that significant discursive shift.

Chapter Four contends that the early 1990s in Canada marked a period of disintegration wherein leading Anglo rock groups produced an assorted, eclectic range of expressive modes. Most of these forms fell under the broad umbrella of alternative music: from the polished country-rock of Blue Rodeo and the gritty blues-tinged rock of The Tragically Hip to the parodic folk-rock of Barenaked Ladies. Glass Tiger's experimentation with trending hard rock, however, represented another significant piece of the heterogeneous mainstream puzzle. The chapter argues that during this period of disintegration for mainstream rock in Canada, hegemonic understandings of gender, sexuality, race, and place individually and collectively shaped the discourse about authenticity.

Chapter Five shows how a heterogeneous mix of Anglo bands – Blue Rodeo, Cowboy Junkies, The Tragically Hip, and Barenaked Ladies – that had each recently resided on the margins of rock music in Canada now constituted the cutting-edge mainstream. It highlights the dialogic nature of popular music production and reception in Canada. Despite occupying prevalent positions rife with complicity, these four diverse groups maintained a few oppositional stances traditionally associated with the margins, subverting some dominant ideologies in the process. The chapter traces both continuity and change within the discourse about authenticity from 1991 to 1993 and demonstrates how it shaped the production and reception of rock music in Canada.

Chapter One: New Romanticism Peaks, 1984-1986

The New Romantic movement started as an English youth subculture creation but eventually it found expression in Canada. During the early 1980s, as part of a direct backlash against the austerity of the punk rock revolution, sound recording artists such as Duran Duran, Culture Club, Eurythmics, Tears For Fears, and Wham led a second British Invasion of Anglo-America by offering a fresh approach to what rock music might become. These bands wholeheartedly embraced synthesizers and the artificial simulation of sound. They also celebrated glamour by dressing in flamboyant, colourful outfits. Taking inspiration from David Bowie and other glam rockers of the 1970s, though lacking the critical self-awareness of those artists, New Romantic groups routinely wore androgynous clothing and cosmetics. Their interest in design, marketing, and image suited the increasing commodification and industrialization of ever more sectors of Canadian society under the auspices of neoliberalism. By the mid-1980s, for a host of reasons, New Romanticism peaked as a musical force and abruptly faded into obsolescence.¹ This chapter contends that the New Romantic movement in Canada reflected a distinctly postmodern cultural condition.

¹ The author gleaned the information on the New Romantic movement in this paragraph from: Dave Rimmer, *The Look: New Romantics* (New York: Omnibus Press, 2013).

This chapter traces the climax of New Romantic rock in Canada. Platinum Blonde burst on to the national scene in 1984 with a sound and look similar to some of the bands leading the second British Invasion. The Toronto trio distinguished itself as one of the first Canadian outfits to take full advantage of music video, an indispensable medium that New Romantic recording artists skilfully leveraged to establish image and garner celebrity. Glass Tiger, which borrowed heavily from New Romanticism for both its tone and appearance during the mid-1980s, represented the final major throe of the movement in Canada. In many significant ways, Platinum Blonde and Glass Tiger characterized the postmodern state of Canadian popular culture, depicting what Fredric Jameson later described as “a new kind of flatness or depthlessness, a new kind of superficiality in the most literal sense.”² At the same time, this pivotal period witnessed the onset of a roots rock revival and the rise of so-called charity rock. This chapter outlines how a multifaceted discourse about authenticity regulated the New Romantic music of Platinum Blonde and Glass Tiger, as well as the bodies that created and consumed it. The ascription of authenticity, it turned out, often required adherence to norms and practices that served to underpin a hetero-patriarchal social order in Canada.

Standing In The Dark

“Are you sitting comfortably?” a middle-aged woman’s voice with a distinctly British accent asked politely. “Then we’ll begin.”³ After a momentary silence, the highly

² Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 9.

³ The opening sequence to Platinum Blonde’s “Doesn’t Really Matter” mimicked a British radio program for children called “Listen with Mother” that aired every weekday afternoon on the BBC from 1950 to 1982. Each short episode of that radio series began with the phrase: “Are you sitting comfortably? Then I’ll begin.” Incidentally, lead singer Mark Holmes’s own mother voiced the start to “Doesn’t Really Matter.”

processed, amplified sound of electric guitarist Sergio Galli plucking out the catchy opening riff to Platinum Blonde's "Doesn't Really Matter" filled the airwaves. It was January of 1984. Radio stations across Canada broadcasted the increasingly popular debut track by the Toronto-based music group. "Doesn't Really Matter" rode the *RPM* Top Singles Chart for nearly three months, peaking at number thirty-one for three consecutive weeks in late February and early March.⁴

Platinum Blonde's "Doesn't Really Matter" offered a sound reminiscent of the chart topping New Romantic rock that had been coming out of Britain over the previous couple of years. Following the lead of successful New Romantic bands, Platinum Blonde purposely developed electric guitar riffs for its own music that emphasized striking single, clean notes rather than distorted power chords.⁵ On "Doesn't Really Matter," for instance, the band layered several electric guitar riffs whose "angularity" or "spikiness" typified the post-punk milieu.⁶ Simple, rhythmic electric bass phrases helped push the vibrant pace of the groove while establishing the harmonic framework of the track. A combination of cutting-edge electronic drums and a traditional acoustic snare filled out the rhythm section. The synth-drum set formed an important component of several New Romantic hits from the early 1980s that embraced its artificial sound. Platinum Blonde used Simmons electronic toms on "Doesn't Really Matter" for more than just percussive punctuation; the ensemble foregrounded them during a memorable drum solo. Synthetic instrumentation like this exemplified the New Romantic aesthetic. Finally, the nasal,

⁴ "RPM - Library and Archives Canada," accessed 2 February 2015, <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/rpm>. The trade magazine, *RPM*, compiled the weekly Top Singles Chart from record store, radio station, and record company reports.

⁵ David Hazan, "Platinum Blonde," *Canadian Musician*, December 1984.

⁶ British music journalist Simon Reynolds argued: "Rather than rama-lama riffing or bluesy chords, the postpunk pantheon of guitar innovators favoured angularity, a clean and brittle spikiness." Simon Reynolds, *Rip It Up and Start Again: Post-Punk 1978-84* (London: Faber, 2005), 20.

British-accented vocals of lead singer Mark Holmes delivered the lyrical message of “Doesn’t Really Matter” through concise melodies.⁷ Youthful, rebellious comments on the hazards of contemporary urban society, including sexual repression and state violence, formed verse sections that each ended with a transition heralding the need to forcibly contest modern strictures. During the chorus, Holmes repeatedly emphasized the unimportance and dullness of everything, expressing an overarching theme of apathy that contrasted with the defiant verse stanzas.

Canadian music critics participated in the discourse of sonic authenticity to categorize recently released recordings such as “Doesn’t Really Matter” into pre-existent music genres.⁸ Their classifications communicated judgments not only about the sound of the music, but about the musicians themselves and their intended audience as well.⁹ To garner the label of “rock music” in Canada, foremost, Platinum Blonde had to display an original sound. More music journalists than not found that the band failed to meet this standard. Reflecting on the New Romantic phenomena that had swept through Canada in 1983, Tom Harrison noted: “Platinum Blonde sounds like a pale copy of everything you’ve heard in the past six months.”¹⁰ Harrison derided the group’s recorded material

⁷ To view the lyrics for Platinum Blonde’s “Doesn’t Really Matter,” see Appendix 1.1.

⁸ Categorizing all the new popular music material represented a mammoth task. Sound recording artists released 1,674 singles in Canada during 1984 alone. Canadian musicians accounted for 528 of those singles. Statistics Canada, *Culture statistics: Sound recording preliminary statistics 1984*. Ottawa: 87-202. Yet, just *one* single by a Canadian artist, Corey Hart’s “Sunglasses At Night,” cracked the Top 100 Singles of 1984 chart compiled by *RPM*. And it only reached #100!

⁹ For a history of genre in American popular music, see: Fabian Holt, *Genre in Popular Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007). To understand how the music industries operate according to genre, check out: Keith Negus, *Music Genres and Corporate Cultures* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

¹⁰ Tom Harrison, “Radio Touts What’s New: Rockin’ 84,” *The Province*, 6 January 1984, sec. Entertainment. Other critics who concurred with Harrison included: Liam Lacey, “Still Another Perspective on Modern Love: POP Cherie Camp,” *The Globe and Mail*, 19 January 1984, sec. Entertainment; Evelyn Erskine, “Pete Hands Torch to Brother Townsend,” *The Ottawa Citizen*, 3 February 1984, sec. Weekender/Entertainment; James Muretich, “And Now (yawn) for a Juno Forecast,” *Calgary Herald*, 5

for lacking musical creativity, a serious breach of sonic authenticity. Nonetheless, a smattering of critics praised Platinum Blonde for its “original,” “fresh,” and “distinctive” sound.¹¹ These contradictory appraisals emphasize the contested nature of music appreciation within the discourse of sonic authenticity, while also highlighting the unanimous import attributed to originality. The championing of individual uniqueness marked all these critiques.

Platinum Blonde’s lyrical content had to display intelligence and seriousness for the group’s debut LP, *Standing In The Dark*, to qualify as real rock music in Canada. Mark Holmes, the ensemble’s chief lyricist, took this tenet of sonic authenticity to mean staying away from cliché-ridden love songs. “We don’t sing about girls,” he made clear. “That’s the main thing that determines the band’s attitude. I write about things that come up – the boy/girl relationship never came up.”¹² This quote is revealing in a number of ways. To begin with, Holmes spoke inaccurately. Two tracks on *Standing In The Dark* featured lyrics that dealt with just such heterosexual unions, albeit from a decidedly anti-romantic point of view that, in part, reflected the influence of British New Romantic attitudes.¹³ Canadian music journalists largely considered the topic of love affairs to be fanciful and escapist; that is to say, inauthentic. For Platinum Blonde, then, intelligent and serious lyrics fundamentally referenced young men and their concerns. Hetero-

December 1984, sec. Entertainment; and Andrew Dreschel, “Romantics Keep Pedal to the Floor,” *The Hamilton Spectator*, 25 May 1984, sec. Rock.

¹¹ Linda Masse, “These Blonds Have Fun Especially with the Fans,” *The Toronto Star*, 13 August 1984, sec. Entertainment; Lois Legge, “Boisterous Crowd Enjoys Energetic Music of Toronto’s Platinum Blonde,” *The Chronicle Herald*, 17 September 1984, sec. Entertainment; and David Hazan, “Platinum Blonde,” *Canadian Musician*, December 1984.

¹² Nick Krewen, “Platinum Blonde: They Really Matter,” *The Record*, 8 October 1984.

¹³ The tracks “Take It From Me” and “Not In Love” both described aspects of romantic heterosexual relationships. To view the lyrics for these two songs, see Appendix 1.2 and 1.3 respectively. To his credit, in a different interview, Mark Holmes acknowledged these songs detailed “the boy/girl relationship,” but claimed they did so in a “realistic” way. See: Dana Robbins, “These Blondes Really Do Have More Fun,” *The Hamilton Spectator*, 9 March 1984, sec. Entertainment.

patriarchy shaped how people valued rock music lyrics in Canada. Several critics doubted the savvy and significance of the lyrical content on the Toronto trio's debut album. Liam Lacey, for one, wrote rather scathingly of Holmes: "His lyrics fill in the spaces between instrumental segments and nothing more."¹⁴ Most music journalists followed Lacey's lead and refused to ascribe sonic authenticity to *Standing In The Dark*.

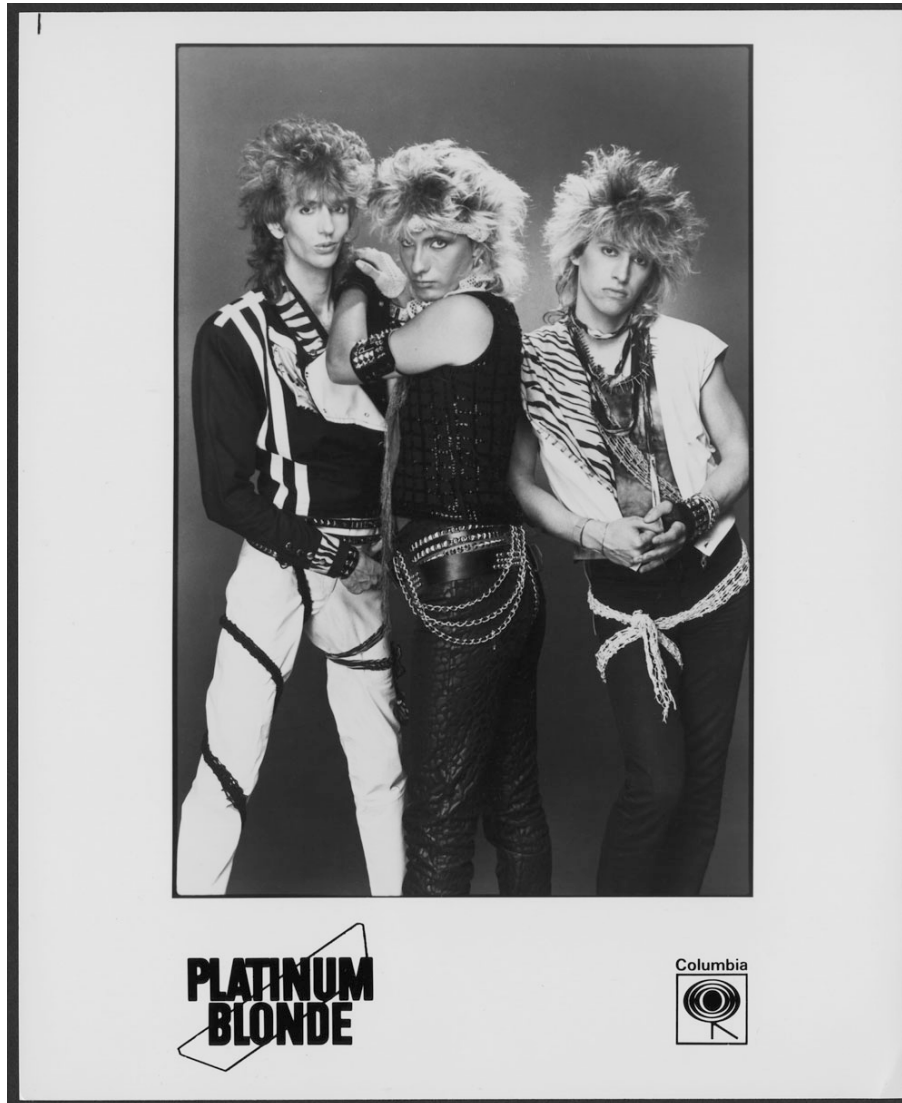


Image 1.1: Platinum Blonde promotional photograph from 1984.¹⁵

¹⁴ Lacey, "Still Another Perspective on Modern Love: POP Cherie Camp." Ouch.

¹⁵ "Platinum Blonde." Columbia Records Publicity Photograph. Canada: Columbia Records, 1984. Library and Archives Canada, *RPM fonds*. <http://collectionsCanada.gc.ca> (accessed 14 January 2017). In the photograph, from left to right, stand Chris Steffler, Mark Holmes, and Sergio Galli.

Platinum Blonde also epitomized the New Romantic look in early 1984. Image had always been a vital component of rock music. Promotional photographs, album covers and inlays, as well as assorted public appearances all comprised opportunities for performers to continually cultivate their visual identities. Although attitudes toward image varied among recording artists and evolved over time, visuals in rock remained consistently related to a message, be it one of countercultural rebellion, artistic integrity, social commentary, and/or sexual exploration. In the late 1970s, however, early new wave bands such as Devo, Talking Heads, and Blondie started toying with visual identity to question the boundaries between reality and artificiality. The advent of Music Television (MTV) in 1981 helped shatter those confines. Broadcasting videos around the clock that featured exceedingly stylized performers pretending to play their latest songs in an effort to garner fame represented the height of the cultural condition called postmodernism.¹⁶ Of course, MTV did not invent the music video, yet the satellite channel turned videos into an integral part of popular music promotion and reception in the late twentieth century.¹⁷ A fresh generation of flashy New Romantic bands surfaced, including Duran Duran and Culture Club, who, rather than examining image, relied upon an interesting look to build their own celebrity. Platinum Blonde characterized the apotheosis of New Romanticism in Canada. As with all the groups leading the second British Invasion, the Toronto trio benefitted tremendously from repeated exposure on the

¹⁶ M. King Adkins, *New Wave: Image Is Everything* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 5. Scholars had argued much earlier that MTV epitomized postmodern culture. See: E. Ann Kaplan, *Rocking Around the Clock: Music Television, Postmodernism, and Consumer Culture* (New York: Methuen, 1987); and Andrew Goodwin, *Dancing in the Distraction Factory: Music Television and Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992).

¹⁷ Will Straw, "Popular Music and Postmodernism in the 1980s," in *Sound and Vision: The Music Video Reader*, ed. Simon Frith, Andrew Goodwin, and Lawrence Grossberg (New York: Routledge, 1993), 2–20.

Canadian equivalent of MTV, MuchMusic: “The Nation’s Music Station,” which launched in August of 1984.

Platinum Blonde developed its New Romantic style most fully through the growing popular medium of music video.¹⁸ Consider the state-of-the-art advertisement for “Doesn’t Really Matter,” directed by Rob Quartly, as a case in point. It began with a pedestal shot of Mark Holmes sitting stoically on a white plush chair in a dimly lit all-white living room setting: moving vertically upward from his posh red leather boots and matching tight leather trousers, past an operational vintage slide projector resting on his lap, only to reveal his slender torso clad in a stylish white leather jacket with red trim, before ending with an extended close-up of his young heavily made up white face and big blond couture hair. Next, a quick shot of Holmes loading the slide projector appeared before the video cut to Platinum Blonde energetically pretending to perform the song together in an empty sound stage with a darkened backdrop. Holmes now dressed in a loose, torn T-shirt and other post-punk accoutrements. His two White band mates adorned themselves in similar New Romantic gear. As the nearly four-minute advertisement unfolded, Quartly split screen time unpredictably between these two settings. During the final shot, Holmes vanished from his spot on the plush chair after unloading the slide projector. This mysterious ending suggested that Holmes, like several other facets of the video, constituted an optical illusion. The commercial, however, provided no anecdotal underpinnings to help viewers determine what it signified. Any meaning remained ultimately indeterminate. Nevertheless, Platinum Blonde’s signature

¹⁸ In fact, music videos had become so prominent in popular music that the Juno Awards launched a Best Video category in 1984. Platinum Blonde garnered two of the five nominations that inaugural year: one for “Doesn’t Really Matter” and the other for “Standing In The Dark.” Toronto’s Rob Quartly of Champagne Productions directed four of the five videos nominated, including both of these Platinum Blonde videos and the Best Video award winning video for Corey Hart’s “Sunglasses At Night.”

hairdos, cosmetic applications, trendy clothing, and chic accessories all formed noteworthy markers of the New Romantic look in early 1984.

Critics debated whether Platinum Blonde genuinely embodied rock music in Canada during the late twentieth century. “People are sometimes confused by a band that sings about the threat of nuclear war, while appearing as though they’re more concerned with hair dye and lip gloss,” music journalist Nick Hazan informed his readership. “Where most bands strive for a visual image that functions as an extension of what they’re attempting to project musically, Platinum Blonde’s image stands decidedly at odds with their content.”¹⁹ The Toronto trio’s serious lyrics had garnered it a modicum of sonic authenticity in the eyes of certain critics. But the group’s carefully manicured visual appeal suggested a preoccupation with superficiality that contradicted the discourse of embodied authenticity in Canada at the time. People traditionally linked visuals in rock music to a message of some sort. For Platinum Blonde, though, image revolved around just looking good. “We happen to like fashion,” Mark Holmes stated matter-of-factly, on the group’s behalf. “That doesn’t affect our music and it shouldn’t affect peoples’ attitudes toward our music.”²⁰ Wishful thinking. Music journalists doubted Platinum Blonde’s hollow image represented embodied authenticity. They felt the Toronto trio lacked a real motive behind its visual identity and, as a result, failed to truly illustrate rock music in Canada.

Critics scrutinized Platinum Blonde’s artistic motivations through the discourse of folkloric authenticity. By July 1984, the band had sold more than 100,000 copies of

¹⁹ Hazan, “Platinum Blonde.” Music journalists also noted Platinum Blonde’s image problem in: Robbins, “These Blondes Really Do Have More Fun”; Hamelin, “Platinum Blonde Rockers Tawdry, Almost Loathsome”; and Barnard, “Platinum Blonde Riding a Wave of Popularity.”

²⁰ Hazan, “Platinum Blonde.”

Standing In The Dark across Canada.²¹ The Canadian music press questioned how the ensemble achieved its extraordinary commercial success. Did the troupe's accomplishments result from hard work and musical talent or cynical calculation and image manipulation? In short, music journalists wondered if Platinum Blonde had "sold out."²² Mark Holmes defended the group's folkloric integrity in a number of interviews. "We never planned a minute of it," he confided. "Even the way the band came together was a fluke. When I came to Canada I had no intention of becoming a rock n' roll star."²³ Platinum Blonde, according to Holmes, did not plot its success. The trio had merely benefitted from a series of fortunate events. The discourse of folkloric authenticity positioned autonomy as the ultimate criterion for measuring which performers properly negotiated commerce and technology to create rock music in Canada. Nothing pleased Holmes more than the band's independence, especially in light of its exploits in the Canadian music industry. In the fall of 1984, when asked what he thought constituted Platinum Blonde's biggest drawing card, Holmes replied: "The fact that we never sold out. We made it being ourselves and I'm proud of that. More than

²¹ Incidentally, in Canada, 100,000 in sales represented platinum sales certification. "Gold/Platinum," *Music Canada*, accessed 2 February 2015, <http://musiccanada.com/gold-platinum>. Platinum Blonde became the second best selling Canadian recording artist of 1984, behind legendary rockers Rush, whose tenth studio album, *Grace Under Pressure*, fared slightly better that year.

²² "Selling out," as musicologist Glenn Pillsbury has noted, "exists largely through the construction of authenticity and as a kind of inverted valuation made on its behalf." Glenn T Pillsbury, *Damage Incorporated: Metallica and the Production of Musical Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 135.

²³ Greg Quill, "Fame on a Fluke: A Phenominal Rise Leaves This Band Standing in the Spotlight," *The Canadian Composer*, September 1984. Mark Holmes moved to Canada from England in 1977, with aspiration of being a football (soccer) player. After experimenting with commercial art and working as an apprentice hairdresser in Toronto, he began concentrating on music and song writing. In late 1982, with some concerts lined up but no band mates with whom he could fulfil his commitments, Holmes placed an advertisement in *The Toronto Star* inviting musicians to join him. Locals Chris Steffler and Sergio Galli answered the call out. Soon after that, Platinum Blonde signed with CBS Records Canada and persuaded David Tickle, a big-name British record producer, to work on its first studio tracks. The six-song mini-album that they hurriedly created together garnered enough attention in Canada during the fall of 1983 to warrant the nationwide release of a full-length album the following January.

anything in the world, I'm proud of that."²⁴ Holmes tapped deep into the discourse of folkloric authenticity and claimed personal fidelity to validate the Toronto trio's successful navigation of Canadian consumer capitalism.

In 1984, Platinum Blonde transformed from an opening act for well-established recording artists into a headlining act in its own right.²⁵ Canadian music journalists evaluated the collective communication during the band's live shows that year to see if they each qualified as a legitimate incarnation of rock music performance.²⁶ Critics focused squarely on both the band on stage and the crowd in attendance to determine if communal authenticity presented itself. A number of music journalists wrote concert reviews that scrutinized Platinum Blonde's musicianship.²⁷ Individual control and collective cohesion formed points of emphasis. Not only did this kind of criticism link bodily discipline to musical virtuosity, it also contributed to a larger conversation regarding advances in recording technology and rock authenticity.²⁸ Live performances allowed Platinum Blonde to demonstrate its skill in rock and prove that the recorded sounds people heard on *Standing In The Dark* did not simply result from studio trickery.

²⁴ Terry Burman, "Blonde on Blonde: Mark Holmes Reflects on Platinum Blonde's Success," *Stereo Guide*, October 1984.

²⁵ Platinum Blonde performed as an opening act for Bryan Adams' fall 1983 Canadian tour. In the first half of 1984, the band opened shows across Canada for Billy Idol, as well as some Ontario dates for The Romantics. By that summer, however, the group proved popular enough to headline big shows in Toronto and other strongholds. On 25 May 1984, Platinum Blonde drew its largest audience ever. Over 25,000 young people jammed Toronto's Nathan Phillips Square that evening.

²⁶ Of the nine Platinum Blonde concert reviews published in 1984, only four suggested the band's performance encompassed real rock music.

²⁷ See: Teresa Mazzitelli, "Blondes Raw Now, but Watch for Impact," *The Edmonton Journal*, 18 January 1984, sec. Entertainment; Hamelin, "Platinum Blonde Rockers Tawdry, Almost Loathsome"; Nick Krewen, "These Blondes Are Having Fun Being Platinum," *The Hamilton Spectator*, 13 August 1984, sec. Entertainment; Hazan, "Platinum Blonde."

²⁸ Simon Frith once argued that: "Technological developments have made the concept of rock authenticity possible." Simon Frith, "Art Versus Technology: The Strange Case of Popular Music," *Media, Culture & Society* 8, no. 3 (July 1986): 269. For an interesting discussion of the link between rock authenticity and the stereotypical alliance of masculinity and technology, see: Jason Lee Oakes, "'I'm a Man': Masculinities in Popular Music," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Popular Musicology*, ed. Derek B. Scott (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 221-242.

Critics discussed the genuineness of the Toronto quartet's body language on stage. Some music journalists described the group's moves in glowing terms. Most did not. Andrew Dreschel, for instance, in his second Platinum Blonde concert review of the year, described the movements of band members this way:

Everything they do seems to be meticulously choreographed. They've got their moves, poses and even their expressions down pat. And they were exactly the same moves, poses and expressions they used to such good effect last May. Even if you're willing to overlook the fact that nearly all Platinum Blonde's songs sound the same, there's just no way around its lack of sincerity.²⁹

Scarcity of physical spontaneity and emotional candour formed the heart of Dreschel's critique. In short, Platinum Blonde appeared inauthentic to him. The polished manoeuvres that favourably impressed some critics signalled to many others the utterly contrived disposition of the band. Such contradictory conclusions highlight the contested nature of collective communication evaluation, demonstrating the ineradicable tension of trying to meet the ideal of authenticity in rock music production and reception in Canada.

Music journalists regularly found Platinum Blonde's audience to be thoroughly adolescent, predominantly comprised of women, and deafeningly loud. Critics quickly pointed out the tender age of the fans. They credited the overwhelming presence of teenage women to the group's heterosexual appeal, though the band's stylized hair and cosmetic use caused some consternation. "Platinum Blonde is a travesty of sexuality," exclaimed music journalist Linda Masse. "Despite their long, blond feminine coiffures and pounds of makeup; they still manage to ooze a macho sensuality – and, as it turns

²⁹ Andrew Dreschel, "Platinum Blonde Has Plenty - but It's Still Not Enough," *The Hamilton Spectator*, 29 December 1984, sec. Entertainment.

out, it's a perfect combination for the successful rock star of the 1980s."³⁰ Traditionally feminine gender markings on male bodies perplexed Masse, until evidence of the band's heterosexual appeal clarified matters for her. The attendance of male youths, however, apparently demanded another explanation. From Platinum Blonde's vantage, the allure for young men seemed clear. "That's because it's hard music, not just boy-meets-girl stuff," Holmes pointed out. "Guys can identify with a sense of power, some sense of direction, something to believe in."³¹ Associating the band's music with manliness through notions of solidity, realism, strength, and order revealed quite a bit about gender relations in rock culture at the time. The discourse of communal authenticity did not paint women Platinum Blonde fans with the same brush. A vast majority of critical comments focused on the hysteria of women in the crowd. "Young women couldn't contain their yelps of uncontrollable adoration for the Toronto group, a few even cried and one actually swooned and almost fainted into her girlfriend's arms," Linda Masse reported.³² By focusing on the incessant screaming and sobbing of young female ticket holders, music journalists such as Masse repeatedly linked womanliness with instability, fantasy, frailty, and derangement. Portraying their bodies as beyond conscious control framed these women as vulnerable and in need of patriarchal protection. The discourse of communal authenticity effectively relegated young women to subordinate social positions within the Canadian rock music scene, reinforcing a male youth homo-social norm.

³⁰ Masse, "These Blonds Have Fun Especially with the Fans." Masse likely referred here to Boy George of Culture Club and the members of Duran Duran. Both androgynous-looking New Romantic groups achieved immense popularity in Canada during 1983 and 1984.

³¹ Hazan, "Platinum Blonde."

³² Masse, "These Blonds Have Fun Especially with the Fans."

Onset of a Canadian Roots Rock Revival

In the early 1980s, as New Romantic rock came to dominate the American and Canadian airwaves with its glossy synthetic style and explicit teen appeal, a burgeoning backlash began to take form. Music historian Theo Cateforis explained:

By 1984 this revolt against the new music had grown into what many critics perceived as a genuine American “roots rock” revival that encompassed bands like R.E.M., the Dream Syndicate, the Del Fuegos, and the Long Ryders, who drew their inspiration from such 1960s sources as the Byrds and psychedelic garage rock.³³

Blue Rodeo, a Toronto band hatched by Jim Cuddy and Greg Keelor in October of that Orwellian year, formed one of the first Canadian incarnations of this Yankee-led revival. The pair of seasoned singer-songwriter-guitarists recently returned from a three-year stint in New York City, where they befriended jazz-inflected keyboardist prodigy Bobby Wiseman, who originally hailed from Winnipeg, Manitoba. Back in Toronto, with Wiseman already on board, Cuddy and Keelor started searching for a rhythm section to complete their new roots rock group and placed a unique call out in a local weekly newspaper. “If you have dropped acid at least 20 times,” the curiously specific classified advertisement began, “lost 2 good years to drugs and another 3 to 5 to booze, play a bass or drums and can still manage to keep time like a metronome, call BLUE RODEO - Jim 465-2978 or Greg 533-3296.”³⁴ Just after Cuddy and Keelor placed that hallucinatory ad, the pair asked experienced drummer Cleave Anderson to join their fledgling outfit. Veteran bassist Bazil Donovan actually answered the unusual job posting and got hired without an audition. Blue Rodeo’s first gig happened less than four months later. Given

³³ Theo Cateforis, *Are We Not New Wave?: Modern Pop at the Turn of the 1980s*, Tracking Pop (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 60.

³⁴ Jim Cuddy and Greg Keelor, “Musicians Wanted,” *Now*, 18 October 1984, sec. Classified.

the state of the Canadian music industries at the time, when image and artificiality seemed to reign supreme, Cuddy and Keelor never expected Blue Rodeo's psychedelic country-rock sound to garner the attention of major record companies.³⁵ Yet, by the end of 1987, their band had landed a distribution deal with Warner Music Canada and led a roots rock revival north of the forty-ninth parallel – thanks in no small part to the financial support of the federal government.

In September 1984, with a landslide election victory, the Progressive Conservative Party gained majority control over the Parliament of Canada for the first time in twenty-six years and quickly put the nation's government on a neoliberal bent. Slashing state spending constituted a top priority. So, that November, the Prime Minister's Office announced an eighty-five million dollar cut from the upcoming federal arts-and-culture budget, deeply alarming the Canadian arts community. These steep reductions accompanied the launching of a Task Force on Funding of the Arts, which the federal government predicated on the notion that arts organizations in Canada needed to develop their acumen in business matters.³⁶ Neoliberalism envisioned the state as a supplementary institution that should facilitate the free and unregulated workings of the global capitalist market economy. Canadian culture industries would become increasingly subject to this ideological framework through the policies of the Conservative regime during the 1980s and early 1990s. Meanwhile, Canadian state representatives understood the importance of culture industries to maintaining a cohesive national identity and, therefore, encouraged the promotion of nationalism through domestic cultural production.

³⁵ Michael Barclay, Ian Andrew Dylan Jack, and Jason Schneider, *Have Not Been the Same: The CanRock Renaissance, 1985-95* (Toronto: ECW Press, 2001), 584.

³⁶ Task Force on Funding of the Arts in Canada, ed., *Funding of the Arts in Canada to the Year 2000: The Report of the Task Force on Funding of the Arts* (Ottawa: Government of Canada, 1986), 75.

One initiative, the Sound Recording Development Program, launched in 1986 and issued funds that supported the release of Blue Rodeo's first album, among many other things.

The Bleach Boys

The year 1985 marked the decline of the New Romantic movement. As Dave Rimmer pointed out, a new social consciousness fostered by Ethiopian famine-relief charity recordings and benefit concerts seeped into British and American rock circles that year, revealing the astounding shallowness of New Romanticism's fixation with pure image.³⁷ In Canada, the popularity of New Romantic bands peaked during the mid-1980s, shortly after this new charitable attitude took hold among rock's leading performers. Platinum Blonde recorded and released its highly anticipated sophomore album, *Alien Shores*, within this historical context. Expectations rode high as the Toronto trio looked to capitalize on its initial success by developing a sound that fused rhythm-oriented grooves with artistic depth in a manner that could capture the coveted, yet elusive, mainstream United States market. To ensure that the ensemble reached this goal, Platinum Blonde hired musician and songwriter Kenny MacLean to lend a hand in the studio.³⁸ MacLean's contributions proved so valuable that the band added him to the line-up as bassist permanently.

Canadian listeners heard the latest Platinum Blonde sound in July 1985, when the band released "Crying Over You" as the lead single from *Alien Shores*. The song immediately resonated with consumers and became a runaway success in Canada.

³⁷ Rimmer, *The Look*, 124–33.

³⁸ Classically trained and a former member of Toronto recording artists The Deserters, Kenny MacLean was an experienced singer who could also play guitar and keyboards. "I never played bass until I joined the Blondes," he later admitted. Mike Mannix and Alastair Sutherland, "Platinum Update: Dinner with the Unknown Blonde," *Graffiti*, August 1986.

“Crying Over You” surfed the *RPM* Top 100 Singles chart for twenty-five weeks, peaking at number one on 7 September 1985.³⁹ Galvanized by an infectious distorted electric guitar riff set to a danceable backbeat, with richly processed vocal melodies accompanied by layered keyboard lines, the highly produced track – written by Holmes with Madonna in mind – saturated the country’s airwaves for months.⁴⁰ Resolve to eschew the emotional distress of a dysfunctional romantic relationship formed the core lyrical message of “Crying Over You.”⁴¹ The self-affirming track, which featured a guest solo by guitarist Alex Lifeson from Rush, helped make Platinum Blonde the biggest English-Canadian band of the year. As a venerated rock guitarist, Lifeson’s taped performance lent the Toronto foursome a measure of his musical gravitas, tacitly endorsing the group’s most recent sound.⁴² Members of the Canadian music press, however, had yet to render their judgments.

Alien Shores garnered a significant amount of attention from music journalists in Canada during the late summer of 1985.⁴³ Critics assessed the sonic authenticity of Platinum Blonde’s latest recording largely in terms of its innovative qualities. Michel Bilodeau commended the band for not simply reconstituting the material that had brought

³⁹ “RPM - Library and Archives Canada.” The single also achieved certified platinum sales on 29 January 1986. “Gold/Platinum,” *Music Canada*, accessed 2 February 2015, <http://musiccanada.com/gold-platinum>.

⁴⁰ Holmes made the Madonna reference in David Sherman, “Groupies’ Delight,” *Graffiti*, September 1985.

⁴¹ For lyric to Platinum Blonde’s “Crying Over You,” see Appendix 1.4.

⁴² Alex Lifeson had been awarded “Best Rock Guitarist” of the year in 1984 by *Guitar Player* magazine. He won runner-up the following two years as well. Apparently, Sergio Galli and Lifeson played tennis together regularly in Toronto. During one of their matches, Galli asked Lifeson to guest on *Alien Shores*. Marie-France Rémillard, “Après une année phénoménale, l’esprit des fêtes est bien présent pour Platinum Blonde,” *Live: Le journal rock*, 18 January 1986. Lifeson wound up recording two guitar solos for the LP. One on the lead single and one on “Holy Water.”

⁴³ Music journalists published reviews of Platinum Blonde’s *Alien Shores* in newspapers from British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Québec, and Nova Scotia.

about its initial commercial success.⁴⁴ The exploration of new sonic territory on *Alien Shores* displayed a creativity that Bilodeau prized. Conversely, for Liam Lacey, Platinum Blonde's new sound constituted "well-produced radio fodder."⁴⁵ Lacey thought it offered an exceedingly accessible tone, one readily available and of little value, whose commonality betrayed its lack of innovation. He would only confer sonic authenticity upon *Alien Shores* if it displayed originality and broke the mould. Platinum Blonde's sophomore effort, according to James Muretich, appeared overly derivative: parts resembled Duran Duran too closely.⁴⁶ Even though it might generate considerable sales, Muretich felt this degree of replication revealed the group's lack of substance. Such plagiarism counted as an unforgivable breach of sonic authenticity. Music critics debated whether Platinum Blonde had innovated enough during its recent recording sessions.

In 1985, the discourse of sonic authenticity demanded that song lyrics be serious and meaningful for a sound recording to qualify as rock music in Canada. Knowing this criterion well, Platinum Blonde ventured into the time-honoured realm of concept music on the latter half of *Alien Shores*.⁴⁷ The Toronto foursome wove a mythic tale recounting

⁴⁴ Michel Bilodeau, "Nouvelle approche qui réussit à Platinum Blonde," *Le Soleil*, 11 August 1985, sec. Rock.

⁴⁵ Liam Lacey, "Breaking out into a Steamy Encore: Pop," *The Globe and Mail*, 25 July 1985, sec. Entertainment.

⁴⁶ James Muretich, "Showy Blond Boys Lack Substance," *Calgary Herald*, 27 July 1985, sec. Entertainment.

⁴⁷ Having an extended theme on a whole album traces back to Woody Guthrie's *Dustbowl Ballads*, originally released in 1940 as two 78rpm records and compiled into one LP twenty-four years later. In 1955, Frank Sinatra released *In The Wee Small Hours*. The recently created long-play record format provided Sinatra the space to delve into sophisticated motifs regarding urban American nightlife at the time. This kind of musical exploration allowed Sinatra to be progressively seen as a serious artist, as opposed to a mere entertainer. The same desire to attain artistic credentials spurred a number of musical groups in the late 1960s – The Beach Boys, The Who, and The Beatles among the most notable – to experiment with themes in their recordings. In the 1970s, British bands such as Emerson, Lake and Palmer, Pink Floyd, and Yes, issued ground breaking concept albums. Canada's own Rush tried its hand at thematic music on three straight records in the 1970s. For more discussion on the concept album and its various incarnations throughout recent history, see: Marianne Tatom Letts, *Radiohead and the Resistant Concept Album: How to Disappear Completely* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010).

humanity's origin over the course of five seamless tracks.⁴⁸ Inspired by the ideas espoused in Erik Von Daniken's 1968 work *Chariots Of The Gods*, and aided by the masterful application of state-of-the-art studio technology, Platinum Blonde constructed an elaborate musical story about extraterrestrial men visiting Earth during her embryonic stage. Driven to this world's alien shores by a cosmic accident, these profoundly intelligent visitors spawned complex forms of civilization. Eventually, people forgot the interplanetary genesis of humankind, leaving unexplained mysteries for contemporary truth-seekers with "hungry eyes" to ponder.⁴⁹

Affording half of its sophomore album to a thematic concept represented a step fraught with uncertainty for Platinum Blonde. "It's a severe risk doing this," Mark Holmes confided. "You're supposed to write safe little pop songs, and we're doing something entirely out of that line."⁵⁰ The band did face an economic liability. Fans might reject the artistic change and sales could suffer as a result. Nonetheless, with the first half of *Alien Shores* stacked with radio-friendly tracks, the risk of restricted sales appeared adequately minimized. The most pressing hazard for the group seemed ideological. Since Platinum Blonde's concept work cited progressive rock norms in an attempt to bolster its sonic authenticity, Canadian music journalists felt positioned to ascertain the appropriateness of these citations. Many critics found the effort of band

⁴⁸ The five songs "Lost In Space," "Temple Of The Newborn," "Holy Water," "Animal," and "Hungry Eyes" interconnected with each other.

⁴⁹ The liner notes for Platinum Blonde's *Alien Shores* featured a message from Mark Holmes about the concept for the second half of the album. It read in full: "Are we alone? Erich Von Daniken asked us to believe the temples and pyramids are proof that earth was visited in its embryonic stage by an ancient intelligence. In writing the lyrics for the interconnecting songs on *Alien Shores*, I was inspired by the thoughts of unexplained mysteries of our past, which may never be answered but hungry eyes will perpetually seek the truth." Platinum Blonde, *Alien Shores* (CBS Records Canada, 1985).

⁵⁰ Alan Niester, "Meteoric Metalmen Manage to Rise Again with New Album," *The Globe and Mail*, 22 July 1985, sec. Entertainment.

members to present themselves as more mature, adventurous songwriters and musicians transparent and insufficient. “Holmes’ Von Daniken side should not be confused with something by Pink Floyd,” Alan Niester warned his readership.⁵¹

Platinum Blonde’s reliance on the feeble scholarship of Erik Von Daniken proved most problematic for the band, at least in terms of the critical reception afforded the second half of *Alien Shores*. Virtually every music journalist covering the Toronto quartet expressed intense scepticism of Von Daniken’s ideas. Marie-France Rémillard, for instance, informed Kenny MacLean and Chris Steffler during an interview that: “Une récente émission américaine démontre que la théorie de Daniken était invraisemblable.”⁵² The bassist and drummer responded by qualifying their understandings of Von Daniken’s assertions. Still, when Holmes carried out interviews with the music press to promote *Alien Shores*, he repeatedly and enthusiastically defended the theory on which the album’s thematic concept rested. “It’s not so mad,” the bandleader insisted. “If you think about it, it’s not that farfetched. Religion is just as farfetched.”⁵³ Considering that significant portions of the Canadian public declared a religious affiliation, discussing sacred beliefs in this dismissive manner risked the ire of theists.⁵⁴ Notwithstanding its spiritual implications, and even beyond its complete improbability, Von Daniken’s theory totally discounted the intelligence and

⁵¹ Niester, “Meteoric Metalmen Manage to Rise Again with New Album.” Also, see: Lacey, “Breaking out into a Steamy Encore: Pop”; Glen Gore-Smith, “Platinum Blonde Aims at Mind,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, 27 July 1985, sec. Entertainment; Muretich, “Showy Blond Boys Lack Substance”; and Evelyn Erskine, “...satiric Message,” *The Ottawa Citizen*, 2 August 1985, sec. Entertainment.

⁵² Translation by author: “A recent American program demonstrated that Daniken’s theory was unlikely.” Rémillard, “Après une année phénoménale, l’esprit des fêtes est bien présent pour Platinum Blonde.”

⁵³ James Muretich, “Band Believes It’s Seen as Canadian ‘Mongrel,’” *Calgary Herald*, 19 September 1985, sec. Entertainment.

⁵⁴ According to the 1981 census, 92.6% of Canadians over the age of 15 had a religious affiliation. By 1991, that number had dropped slightly to 87.5%. Statistics Canada, *Canada’s Culture, Heritage and Identity: A Statistical Perspective 1995 Edition*. Ottawa: 87-211.

sophistication of Indigenous peoples from venerable times. Instead of acknowledging various ancient structures as the creations of numerous different Indigenous peoples, Von Daniken's Euro-centric conception of human origins attributed their construction to extraterrestrial beings. This highly troublesome take constituted a narrative of disenfranchisement. Not a single Canadian music critic pointed out the racist European imperial colonial mindset at the heart of Von Daniken's theory.



Image 1.2: Platinum Blonde promotional photograph from 1985.⁵⁵

Platinum Blonde continued to showcase its New Romantic style most effectively through music video. Shot over three summer days in and around Toronto, with award-

⁵⁵ "Platinum Blonde." Columbia Records Publicity Photograph. Canada: Columbia Records, 1985. Library and Archives Canada, *RPM fonds*. <http://collectionscanada.gc.ca> (accessed 14 January 2017). In the photograph, from left to right, stand Sergio Galli, Kenny MacLean, Mark Holmes, and Chris Steffler.

winning director Rob Quarty behind the camera once again, the video for “Crying Over You” introduced Kenny MacLean as a band member and formally presented the group’s fresh moneyed look for *Alien Shores*. The members of Platinum Blonde dressed in dark pressed cotton slacks, light blue formal sports jackets with padded shoulders, and trendy white collared shirts.⁵⁶ Plus, they sported plenty of cosmetics and copious hairspray. The luxurious commercial for “Crying Over You” developed the song’s theme of resolving to eschew the emotional distress of a dysfunctional romantic relationship. Interspersed among clips of Platinum Blonde pretending to be performing the song in an intricately designed sound stage, Quarty introduced a series of sun-drenched vignettes. In each scenario a different band member interacted with a comely young woman in a unique lavish outdoor location: leaving a mansion to ride in a chauffeur-driven Rolls Royce; sailing the open waves on a deluxe yacht; receiving butler service while enjoying a posh poolside view; and disembarking a private jet before setting off in a flash Mercedes convertible. At the end of the extended advertisement, back in the sound stage, each musician took a turn dramatically discarding a Polaroid picture of him and his recent romantic interest on to a circular table covered in a thin layer of water. The final shot captured Platinum Blonde slamming all its hands on to the table in unison, splashing water into the air in a spectacular gesture of male solidarity. The video for “Crying Over You” portrayed Platinum Blonde as exceedingly rich rock stars spurned by sultry vixens. It illustrated the essence of hetero-patriarchal fantasy.

Conspicuous class markings comprised a most remarkable facet of Platinum Blonde’s latest New Romantic image. “We wanted a new style, something that would

⁵⁶ Drummer Chris Steffler dressed somewhat differently. He had a pink collared shirt and a light grey sports jacket on instead.

take us out of a local context and give us a more upscale look,” Kenny MacLean made clear.⁵⁷ MacLean considered appearing cosmopolitan and elegant a perk of show business. He enjoyed emulating the glamour that rockers David Bowie and Mark Bolan had displayed on stage in the early 1970s.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, the glitz that Bowie and Bolan projected contained messages about gender identity and shifting social norms. Platinum Blonde’s image, on the contrary, constituted a purely ostentatious style. Dressing in jet set suits, wearing expensive jewellery and copious makeup, and sporting highly stylized hairdos epitomized New Romantic fashion in the middle of the “go-go eighties,” when yuppies greedily competed for power and prestige in an increasingly neoliberal marketplace. During an age of unparalleled consumerism, Platinum Blonde’s image expressed a typically New Romantic, and postmodern, lingering preoccupation with visual superficialities.

The way Platinum Blonde adorned itself illustrated to music journalists the degree to which the group appeared suited to make authentic rock music in Canada. With salon-quality hairstyles and high society clothing, the group’s priorities seemed misplaced to some critics. For example, as James Muretich pointed out, the band even allotted space on the liner notes for *Alien Shores* to give credit to Vidal Sassoon for its hair and Fashion Tech for its wardrobe.⁵⁹ Believing that Canadian music journalists did not take the ensemble seriously, Platinum Blonde tended to the discourse of embodied authenticity in a couple of interesting ways. First, in interview after interview, band members tried to portray the group’s visual identity as natural. “Our image is ourselves,” Kenny MacLean

⁵⁷ Greg Quill, “Blondes Have Platinum Touch,” *The Toronto Star*, 3 August 1985, sec. Entertainment.

⁵⁸ Helen Metella, “Platinum Blonde - Pop’s Peter Pan,” *The Edmonton Journal*, 17 July 1986, sec. Pulse.

⁵⁹ Muretich, “Band Believes It’s Seen as Canadian ‘Mongrel.’” Platinum Blonde also credited Visions and Vallente Jewellery for its accessories.

insisted. “The clothes we wear on stage are basically what we wear off stage.”⁶⁰ Sure, MacLean conceded, the fellows in the band loved finery, but they remained faithful to the ideal of authenticity. Another discursive strategy deployed by Platinum Blonde highlighted the fact that all popular musicians, even humbly dressed rock stars such as Bryan Adams, catered to their visual appeal. “Bryan Adams goes on stage wearing blue jeans and a white T-shirt,” Mark Holmes related. “Man, when he’s touring he has a trunk full of identical blue jeans and white T-shirts and 50 pairs of those boots. Are you telling me that’s not an image?”⁶¹ Holmes thought it unfair to single out Platinum Blonde for cultivating its image when that behaviour formed standard industry practice. The problem for the Toronto foursome, however, stemmed from the fact that rock music culture had long been under the influence of a middle-class bohemianism that idolized working-class values.⁶² Bryan Adams largely got a pass because his blue-collar look, albeit trite, matched the prevailing expectations in the discourse of embodied authenticity for creators of rock music in Canada. Platinum Blonde’s cutting-edge neo-patrician style proved too much for critics who thought the band needed to appear less conformist, less corrupted by commerce, to properly exhibit embodied authenticity.

⁶⁰ Metella, “Platinum Blonde - Pop’s Peter Pan.” The author observed the band attempt to frame its new image as natural in: Eric Bernard and Yves Leclerc, “La Blondemania,” *Le Monde du rock*, January 1986; John Mackie, “Band That Drives Teenagers Crazy,” *The Vancouver Sun*, 30 September 1985, sec. Entertainment; Evelyn Erskine, “Platinum Blonde More than Glitter,” *The Ottawa Citizen*, 3 December 1985, sec. Entertainment; Pitkeathly, “Platinum Blonde: A Lot More than Meets the Ear”; “Un 45 t. francophone pour Platinum Blonde,” *RAM: Radio-activité-magazine*, April 1986.

⁶¹ Muretich, “Band Believes It’s Seen as Canadian ‘Mongrel’.” Platinum Blonde toured Canada with Bryan Adams for several weeks in late 1983. The author also found this particular discursive strategy in: Alain de Repentigny, “15000 personnes pour la soirée canadienne,” *La Presse*, 31 August 1986, sec. Arts et spectacles; Kevin Prokosh, “Pot-Shots Turn Blondes Grey,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, 6 September 1985, sec. Entertainment; and Erskine, “Platinum Blonde More than Glitter.”

⁶² The roots of this bohemianism stretched back to when rock emerged as a distinct genre category in the mid-1960s. David Simonelli, *Working Class Heroes: Rock Music and British Society in the 1960s and 1970s* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2013), 97.

On 2 August 1985, Platinum Blonde launched its first national tour of Canada as a headlining act. This series of spectacles, dubbed the Alien Invasion Tour, reached thirty-one cities across the country over the next ten weeks. With an elaborate stage production that took three semi-trailers full of the latest concert gear to furnish and twenty-one road crew members to work, Platinum Blonde decided to secure corporate sponsorship from the Labatt Brewing Company to help underwrite and promote the mammoth enterprise.⁶³ In exchange for a \$500,000 investment, Labatt ostensibly gained access to a key consumer demographic; namely, nineteen to thirty-four year-olds who listened to rock music. Yet, since most Canadians who attended Platinum Blonde concerts could not legally drink alcohol, the group agreed to forego any direct product endorsement. The controversy over Labatt's involvement in the tour reached beyond the issue of underage drinking to the question of folkloric authenticity. Platinum Blonde had apparently chosen money over creative freedom. Allying its live presentation with business interests, although an economically savvy move for any group wishing to play across Canada on such a grand scale, betrayed a corporate mindedness seen by many a critic as antithetic to rock artistry.⁶⁴ The discourse of folkloric authenticity positioned autonomy as the ultimate yardstick for determining whether Platinum Blonde properly negotiated commerce while creating rock music in Canada. Music journalists doubted Platinum Blonde's independence because the ensemble aligned with Labatt for the Alien Invasion

⁶³ Ten years had passed since Labatt last helped promote rock music in Canada. Back in the mid 1970s, the beer maker sponsored a national tour by the Canadian band Lighthouse. As it turned out, the opening act of the tour, a comedy duo called MacLean and MacLean, proved rather controversial and the publicity they generated scared Labatt off backing rock music for a while. Dave Haynes, "Rock 'N' Beer: Breweries Hope Tour Promotion Will Cause Profits to Roll in," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 2 August 1985, sec. Entertainment.

⁶⁴ Frain Cory, "Platinum Blonde's Appeal Lost to Art Rock Ambitions," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 11 September 1985, sec. Entertainment.

Tour. Critics located folkloric authenticity in isolation from the commercial sphere. Nevertheless, corporate sponsorship of recording artists became progressively common in the 1980s, signalling a thriving union of rock music and advertising.⁶⁵ With the financial support of a major national brewery, not to mention the public exposure of a number one hit single, the Alien Invasion Tour grossed over \$1,300,000 by the time it wrapped up in Montréal, Québec on October 13th.⁶⁶ These performances and all the music press coverage they engendered also helped push sales of *Alien Shores* to the triple-platinum mark in Canada that November.

Critics determined whether Platinum Blonde's Alien Invasion Tour shows qualified as genuine incarnations of rock music mostly by scrutinizing ticket holders at the gigs, though several concert reviews also evaluated the group's musical competency as rockers.⁶⁷ No one appeared more aware of these principles of communal authenticity than the group's founder. "For while he loves his young, adoring female fans, Holmes takes his music very seriously and he wants it taken seriously by others," Doreen Pitkeathly reported. "And that means an audience for Platinum Blonde that covers a wider age range and includes more members of the male sex."⁶⁸ Essentially, in order to earn a place in the pantheon of rock music in Canada, the band had to secure the approval

⁶⁵ MTV formed a key factor in this process. It helped make rock music more palatable to advertisers. Timothy Dean Taylor, *The Sounds of Capitalism: Advertising, Music, and the Conquest of Culture* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), 180-201.

⁶⁶ The author gleaned this revenue figure from: David Farrell, "Blondes' Manager Confronts Rumours," *The Record*, 14 March 1988.

⁶⁷ Nick Krewen and Stéphane Giroux thought the band put on a good show. Nick Krewen, "Platinum Blonde: Group Shows It Has Right Goods," *The Hamilton Spectator*, 9 October 1985, sec. Entertainment and Stéphane Giroux, "Platinum Blonde: pas que des fringues," *Live: Le journal rock*, 9 November 1985. Many more critics, however, stressed Platinum Blonde's musical shortcomings. See: Liam Lacey, "Blond-Tressed Bombshells a National Phenomenon," *The Globe and Mail*, 3 August 1985, sec. News; Sherman, "Groupies' Delight"; Cory, "Platinum Blonde's Appeal Lost to Art Rock Ambitions"; James Muretich, "Duran Duran Could Sue Blondes," *Calgary Herald*, 20 September 1985, sec. Entertainment; and "Groups Have Audience Dancing on Seats," *The Ottawa Citizen*, 12 October 1985, sec. Entertainment.

⁶⁸ Pitkeathly, "Platinum Blonde: A Lot More than Meets the Ear."

of male youths. Platinum Blonde repeatedly claimed to have done just that: if critics looked beyond the first three rows of screaming teenage women at its shows, they would see that half of the band's audience consisted of men aged eighteen to twenty-five.⁶⁹ Still, when music journalists did scour the entire crowd, they frequently noticed pubescent women in hysterics. According to the discourse of communal authenticity, because mature male bodies appreciated rock music best, these women fans hardly qualified as rock aficionados. This age-old, deeply sexist notion conflated manly morphology with rock connoisseurship in Canada. Music critics who participated in this chauvinist discourse regularly noted the uncontrollable swooning and other such paroxysms afflicting the young women in the crowd at a Platinum Blonde show. By focusing on the thousands of teenaged women sent into a tizzy by the sex symbols on stage, this particular analysis of Platinum Blonde's Alien Invasion Tour undermined these fans as music buffs, ensuring their marginalization within the realm of rock music culture.

Platinum Blonde rode an extraordinary wave of popularity in the fall of 1985 that eventually spread well beyond the group's base in the Golden Horseshoe. Canadian music press coverage on the band reveals the extent of that nationwide expansion. Although the ensemble made significant gains in the prairies and on the west coast, the dramatic increase of reporting in French-speaking central Canada proved most notable.⁷⁰ The discourse of communal authenticity in French-language articles regarding Platinum

⁶⁹ Pitkeathly, "Platinum Blonde: A Lot More than Meets the Ear."; Erskine, "Platinum Blonde More than Glitter."

⁷⁰ Music journalists penned three substantive articles in French on Platinum Blonde during the *Standing In The Dark* press cycle and fourteen during the *Alien Shores* press cycle. Much of this increase may be attributable to the penetration of MuchMusic into the Québec market.

Blonde explicitly linked collective communication to the language of the band's lyrics.⁷¹ Critics minded the linguistic colonization of French Canada. Domestic rock music with French lyrics helped express, bolster, and protect a collective Francophone identity that bore colonial roots stretching back to the sixteenth century. By singing in English, Platinum Blonde could never acquire the communal authenticity that rocker Gerry Boulet had earned in French Canada. Nonetheless, the Toronto-based band appreciated the Francophone backing it experienced and even voiced support for the sovereignty movement in the province of Québec in one interview.⁷² Québécois nationalism had been on the wane since the 1980 Referendum. Meanwhile, sales of domestically produced albums in French plummeted throughout the province.⁷³ This confluence meant that bands such as Men Without Hats and The Box, whose members all identified as Francophone, started seeing English less as the language of oppression and more as the language of opportunity. Singing in the tongue of the so-called other solitude now constituted a business cost for them. Many a French-Canadian rock critic lamented the cultural ramifications this linguistic trend augured.

Even with the exceptional commercial success Platinum Blonde enjoyed in Canada, the band needed to attain a similar level of prosperity in the American market to make ends meet. Canadian sales had not covered the staggering costs of producing and

⁷¹ For a prime example of how and why Francophone critics made this argument, see: Nathalie Petrowski, "Speak White: De l'accusation...à la nécessité," *Le Devoir*, 9 November 1985, sec. Culturel. Unsurprisingly, virtually all anglophone music journalists took it for granted that real rock music in Canada featured lyrics in English.

⁷² *Alien Shores* sold close to 100,000 copies in the province of Québec alone. Rémillard, "Après une année phénoménale, l'esprit des fêtes est bien présent pour Platinum Blonde."

⁷³ Lucinda Chodan, "Quebec Stars Turn to the Larger Market in France," *The Gazette*, 14 December 1985, sec. Entertainment.

marketing *Alien Shores*.⁷⁴ In 1985, Rush, Bryan Adams, and Loverboy represented the only Canadian rock artists that had recently garnered significant sales in the United States market.⁷⁵ Platinum Blonde spared no expense to join their ranks but *Alien Shores* only sold a paltry 70,000 copies south of the forty-ninth parallel. Plus, adding insult to injury, certain music critics down there developed a derogatory nickname for Platinum Blonde: The Bleach Boys.⁷⁶ With little American interest to speak of, the Toronto quartet proceeded writing and recording its pivotal third album.

The Return of Meaning

A new social consciousness, spawned in and through Ethiopian famine relief sound recording projects, spread through Canadian popular music circles in 1985. Following the lead of their counterparts in Britain and the United States, the most famous Canadian recording artists of the day gathered together that February to help starving Africans by making so-called charity rock.⁷⁷ They named themselves Northern Lights and recorded the philanthropic single “Tears Are Not Enough” over a few hours at Manta Sound studios in Toronto. These Ethiopian famine relief efforts culminated in July with Live-

⁷⁴ Record companies easily spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on basic costs to produce and promote a typical LP, including: studio recording time; mixing, mastering, and pressing operations; music video production; print, radio, and television advertisements; and tour support. Greg Quill, “Canadian Rock Has a Hard Time Rolling in the U.S.,” *The Toronto Star*, 13 April 1986, sec. Entertainment.

⁷⁵ Between 1980 and 1985, in the United States, Rush sold over three million albums, Bryan Adams sold nearly five million records, and Loverboy sold over six million copies of its LPs. “RIAA - Gold & Platinum Searchable Database,” accessed 6 February 2016, <http://www.riaa.com/goldandplatinumdata>.

⁷⁶ The American sales figure above comes from: Greg Quill, “Dream of U.S. Gold Has Soured for Cream of Canada’s Pop Crop,” *The Toronto Star*, 2 May 1987, sec. Entertainment. News of the nickname came from: Thomas Schnurmacher, “There’ll Be Whole Lot of Payin’ Goin’ on: Judge,” *The Gazette*, 19 August 1986, sec. Entertainment.

⁷⁷ British musicians led these Ethiopian famine relief efforts by forming the superstar ensemble Band-Aid in late 1984 and releasing the charity single “Do They Know It’s Christmas?” that December. American recording artists followed suit in late January 1985, creating the all-star group called USA for Africa and releasing a charity single, “We Are The World,” that March.

Aid, a star-studded dual-continent benefit concert that television stations broadcasted across the globe to nearly two billion viewers, an astonishing forty percent of the world's population. Literary scholar Matthew King Adkins described the advent of this new social consciousness as a contrived reaction to the cultural condition of postmodernism. "Yes, these benefits raised money, lots of money, for worthy causes," Adkins conceded. "They did so, however, by leveraging celebrity image. And while these artists were trying to connect the sign of their celebrity to hunger relief efforts in Africa, the real effect was to elicit good will for the artists themselves."⁷⁸ This situation certainly emerged in Canada, where music press coverage of Northern Lights consistently highlighted the generosity of the country's popular music royalty for donating their time and energy to such a noble project. Despite the widespread urge to give weight and meaning back to rock music again, celebrity thoroughly ensconced Ethiopian famine relief in the mid-eighties.⁷⁹

At the same time that charity rock brought a new social consciousness to the Canadian popular music scene in 1985, resistance to the New Romantic movement continued to build. A growing number of discriminating rock music enthusiasts in Canada became increasingly disenchanted with the overwhelming trendiness and commercial calculation that surrounded outfits such as Duran Duran or Platinum Blonde. As the year progressed, bands steeped in rock's country and blues roots started gaining prominence and began shaping the discourse about authenticity in Canada. Britain's Dire Straits, for example, scored a worldwide smash hit with "Money For Nothing," a roots-

⁷⁸ Adkins, *New Wave*, 114.

⁷⁹ Lyle Slack, "Fans Fight for Glimpses of Favorite Stars: Taping to Aid Starving," *The Hamilton Spectator*, 11 February 1985, sec. Entertainment.

inflected electric guitar-driven song whose homophobic lyrical message berated gender-bending New Romantic rock artists.⁸⁰ Music historian Theo Cateforis argued that this track constituted an example of “real rock” defending against the encroachments of “new music” in the 1980s.⁸¹ Two more future leaders of the roots rock revival in Canada, Cowboy Junkies and The Tragically Hip, entered the musical fray at this time.⁸² By the end of 1985, although roots rock had clearly gained extensive notoriety, New Romantic groups still enjoyed tremendous popularity. For instance, another trendy British import, Tears For Fears, delivered the second-best-selling album in the nation that year.⁸³

New Romanticism Peaks

Glass Tiger’s *The Thin Red Line* represented the peak of New Romanticism in Canada. Released in February 1986 by Capitol Records, it sounded similar to the hottest new music coming out of Britain. As novice record makers, the members of Glass Tiger – drummer Michael Hanson, keyboardist Sam Reid, guitarist Al Connelly, bassist Wayne Parker, and lead singer Alan Frew – relied heavily on the skills and guidance of Jim Vallance, then best known as the songwriting partner of Canadian rock music superstar Bryan Adams.⁸⁴ Vallance helped the eager young quintet from Newmarket, Ontario,

⁸⁰ In “Money For Nothing” by Dire Straits, the lyrics for the second verse read as follows: “See the little faggot with the earring and the make-up/Yeah buddy that’s his own hair/That little faggot got his own jet airplane/That little faggot he’s a millionaire.”

⁸¹ Theo Cateforis, *Are We Not New Wave?*, 233.

⁸² Cowboy Junkies took form in Toronto during the fall of 1985. The Tragically Hip finalized its line-up in Kingston, Ontario, around the same time.

⁸³ Other notable New Romantic entries on the *RPM* Top 100 Albums of 1985 chart included Wham at number eight and Platinum Blonde at number eleven. “RPM - Library and Archives Canada,” accessed 4 April 2016, <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/rpm>.

⁸⁴ Bryan Adams had sold over five million copies of his fourth studio album, *Reckless*, in the United States alone since its release in November 1984. “RIAA - Gold & Platinum Searchable Database,” accessed 23 May 2015, <http://www.riaa.com/goldandplatinumdata>. Furthermore, in December 1985, Bryan Adams became the first Canadian artist in history to sell a million copies of a single album in Canada when

arrange, write, and record commercially viable material for *The Thin Red Line* during the summer of 1985. Capitol Records anticipated tremendous sales and, thus, spared no expense producing, packaging, and promoting the band's debut LP.⁸⁵

Glass Tiger composed the first single from *The Thin Red Line*, "Don't Forget Me (When I'm Gone)," with Jim Vallance back in May 1985.⁸⁶ They created an up-tempo, lively piece designed to reach a mass audience immediately. "The single has everything," Michael Hanson pointed out, "a brilliant melody, lyrics that everybody can understand – it's got brass, the shuffle, and it's very tempting."⁸⁷ Alan Frew conveyed a relatable lyrical message of unrequited love through the exuberant melody for "Don't Forget Me (When I'm Gone)."⁸⁸ Near the end of the track, though, several distinctive raspy guest vocal lines from Bryan Adams punctuated the melodic soundscape. His prominent cameo epitomized Glass Tiger's desire to make it big. The full impact of the song's sugary romantic message, nonetheless, depended upon the ways in which the vocals interacted with the sound of the computer-sequenced drumbeat, catchy shuffling bass,⁸⁹ invigorating horn lines, chiming electric guitar, and layers of sparkling synthesizers on the track. Band members wanted a song that would get the group noticed. Well, they got it. Released in January 1986, "Don't Forget Me (When I'm Gone)" became the number

Reckless reached Diamond sales status. "Gold/Platinum," *Music Canada*, accessed 23 May 2015, <http://musiccanada.com/gold-platinum>.

⁸⁵ Capitol Records reportedly spent over \$500,000 getting *The Thin Red Line* to market. Peter Goddard, "Glass Tiger's Light Is Burning Bright on Bottom Line," *The Toronto Star*, 7 November 1986, sec. Entertainment.

⁸⁶ The Simple Minds hit song "Don't You (Forget About Me)," which climbed to the top of the Canadian recorded music charts during the spring of 1985, inspired Glass Tiger's choice of song title for "Don't Forget Me (When I'm Gone)."

⁸⁷ Kevin Prokosh, "Outside Help Gets Some Credit for Glass Tiger's LP Success," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 23 March 1986, sec. Entertainment.

⁸⁸ To view the lyrics for Glass Tiger's "Don't Forget Me (When I'm Gone)," see Appendix 1.5.

⁸⁹ Because it drove the shuffle rhythm while guiding the bold harmony, the electric bass constituted the most crucial instrument in the mix. Interestingly enough, Wayne Parker did not play the bass on "Don't Forget Me (When I'm Gone)." Rock veteran Doug Edwards put it on tape instead. Apparently, Vallance spurned the studio performance of Glass Tiger's bassist and sought out an expert to get the sound he wanted.

one single in Canada late that March and the number two single in America the following October.⁹⁰ The runaway hit introduced Glass Tiger's mainstream New Romantic sound to millions of listeners around the world, and Canadian music journalists took note.

Critics debated whether or not Glass Tiger's *The Thin Red Line* actually constituted genuine rock music in Canada. Music journalists differed greatly in their categorization of the band's material.⁹¹ Many critics thought Glass Tiger displayed decent musicianship but its sound seemed too soft and affectionate, too slick and accommodating, too safe and adolescent to be deemed real rock.⁹² Instead, they argued, it comprised "pop" clearly geared to entertain school-bound women. The discourse of sonic authenticity held that rock music functioned primarily as the domain of discriminating heterosexual male youth. Music journalists repeatedly, explicitly linked pop to impressionable straight young women. The Newmarket quintet's vehement opposition to the pop tag spoke volumes. "We're just a little more creative than a 'pop' band," Michael Hanson asserted. "There is a lot of substance to our music."⁹³ The drummer felt Glass Tiger's artistry displayed a meaningfulness that qualified its sound as rock music. Hanson

⁹⁰ Glass Tiger's "Don't Forget Me (When I'm Gone)" reached the top of the *RPM* Top 100 Singles chart on 29 March 1986. "RPM - Library and Archives Canada," accessed 5 May 2015, <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/rpm>. The band released the track as a single in the United States a few months later and it hit the number two spot on the *Billboard* Hot 100 chart the week of 11 October 1986. "Glass Tiger," *Billboard*, <http://www.billboard.com/charts/hot-100/1986-10-11>.

⁹¹ In articles published during *The Thin Red Line* press cycle, which lasted from December 1985 to November 1987, music journalists categorized Glass Tiger's sound as "rock" 47.8% of the time, "pop" 43.5% of the time, and "pop-rock" 8.7% of the time.

⁹² The author observed these arguments in: James Adams, "Canada's Rock Just Pablum," *The Edmonton Journal*, April 1, 1986, sec. Entertainment; Craig MacInnis, "Triumphant Glass Tiger Looking for Big Numbers," *The Toronto Star*, 18 June 1986, sec. Entertainment; Randal McIlroy, "Glass Tiger Thrills Huge, Screaming Crowd at Ex," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 28 June 1986, sec. Entertainment; James Adams, "Glass Tiger out of Place in Centre," *The Edmonton Journal*, 26 July 1986, sec. Lively Arts; Lucinda Chodan, "Energetic Luba Warms up the Opening-Night Crowd," *The Gazette*, 23 August 1986, sec. Entertainment; Randal McIlroy, "Tepid Rock Double Bill Marked by Limp Songs, Charmless Playing," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 16 August 1987, sec. Entertainment; Deirdre Kelly, "Glass Tiger Gets the Crowd Roaring," *The Globe and Mail*, 9 September 1987, sec. Entertainment; Craig MacInnis, "Glass Tiger Flexes Muscles," *The Toronto Star*, 9 September 1987, sec. Entertainment.

⁹³ "Glass Tiger: Brass and Shuffle Brings LP Home," *RPM (Weekly)*, 15 March 1986.

diligently cited tenets of the discourse of sonic authenticity here. Sam Reid rejected the pop label in a similar vein. “We don’t feel that’s the kind of band we want to be,” he explained. “We don’t want to be a fashion band. The music is too important to us.”⁹⁴ Sure, the keyboardist conceded, the pop-oriented first single might mislead some listeners, but after hearing the entire album, no one could doubt that the band members seriously rocked. Glass Tiger’s protestations married realms traditionally linked with manliness, such as the mind and culture, to rock music as a means of proving its sonic authenticity.

During *The Thin Red Line* press cycle, Glass Tiger often encountered Canadian music journalists who clung to the notion that the ensemble represented a manufactured product, the result of managerial tactics and marketing ploys. “The Tiger was designed by the industry for the industry,” Peter Goddard proclaimed confidently.⁹⁵ Framing Glass Tiger as a made-to-order demographer’s dream allowed Goddard to raise doubt with regard to the band’s folkloric authenticity. The Newmarket quintet attended to this discourse in several interviews by asserting its autonomy, its independence from external interference and control. “Glass Tiger est une organisation complètement démocratique,” Alan Frew stated. “Le band est entièrement responsable de la musique.”⁹⁶ Stressing that all five members had creative input and shared equal responsibility for the group’s sound conveyed that they constituted a legitimate rock group. Still, some music critics continued to question the imprint that outside influences had on Glass Tiger, especially

⁹⁴ Prokosh, “Outside Help Gets Some Credit for Glass Tiger’s LP Success.”

⁹⁵ Goddard, “Glass Tiger’s Light Is Burning Bright on Bottom Line.”

⁹⁶ Translation by author: “Glass Tiger is a completely democratic organization. The band is fully responsible for the music.” Martin Laverdière, “Nouvelle révélation canadienne: Glass Tiger,” *Le Monde du rock*, April 1986. The author also found this democratic trope in: Mike Edge, “Suite Treat for Rockers,” *The Leader-Post*, 27 March 1986, sec. Entertainment; “Glass Tiger Plans City Concert Date,” *The Guardian*, 12 August 1986, sec. News; Coxson, “Glass Tiger”; “Glass Tiger,” *Playboard*, July 1987.

when they pondered the involvement of Jim Vallance and Bryan Adams in the project.⁹⁷ “Don’t Forget Me (When I’m Gone),” in particular, with its polished production and signature vocals, sounded like a typical Vallance-Adams chart topper. “This underscores the basic flaw of this band,” critic Evelyn Erskine noted. “It has yet to find its own musical direction.”⁹⁸ Until Glass Tiger became self-sufficient musically, Erskine withheld the ascription of folkloric authenticity. Nevertheless, not all music journalists shared Erskine’s estimate. Glen Gore-Smith, for instance, contended that neither Vallance nor Adams had interfered with Glass Tiger’s sound.⁹⁹ These contradictory appraisals highlight the fact that the ascription of folkloric authenticity encompassed a decidedly contested practice in the Canadian music press.

⁹⁷ Given that Glass Tiger’s bassist did not play on “Don’t Forget Me (When I’m Gone)” and its drummer did not play on the second big hit “Someday,” not to mention the several guest appearances of Bryan Adams’ guitarist, Keith Scott, critics had some cause to doubt Glass Tiger’s musical self-reliance.

⁹⁸ Evelyn Erskine, “LP of Lennon’s Last Concert Benefits from Rehearsed Band,” *The Ottawa Citizen*, 7 March 1986, sec. Weekender.

⁹⁹ Glen Gore-Smith, “Setzer’s The Knife Feels Like Justice Sounds like a Waffle Job,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, 19 March 1986, sec. Entertainment.

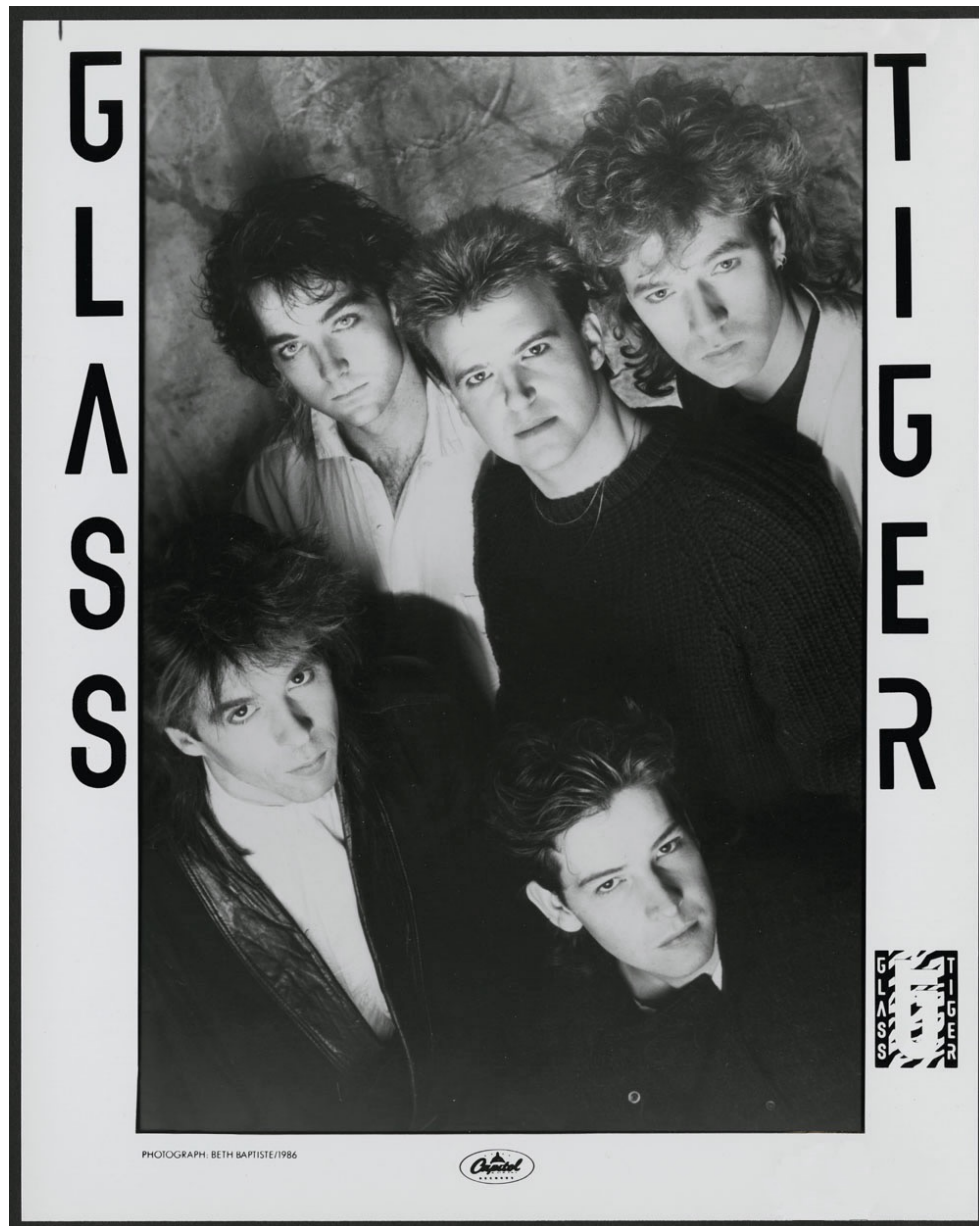


Image 1.3: Glass Tiger promotional photograph from 1986.¹⁰⁰

Taking direction from its New Romantic predecessors, Glass Tiger established a trendy image primarily through the medium of music video. Rob Quarty directed the video for “Don’t Forget Me (When I’m Gone),” which illustrated a 1950s suburban heterosexual pastoral scene rendered through the prism of postwar romance comic

¹⁰⁰ “Glass Tiger.” Capitol Records Publicity Photograph. Canada: Capitol Records, 1986. Library and Archives Canada, *RPM fonds*. <http://collectionscanada.gc.ca> (accessed 14 January 2017). In this photograph, from left to right, appear Al Connelly, Michael Hanson, Sam Reid, Alan Frew, and Wayne Parker.

books.¹⁰¹ It opened with a point-of-view shot of a pink-gloved hand tapping a finger to the song's beat on the steering wheel of a vintage car. The extended commercial continued almost entirely from the perspective of the unknown woman driver. At first she found Alan Frew in a bedroom reading a copy of *Romantic Secrets* from April 1950. He wore a blue collared shirt with the sleeves rolled up, white slip on shoes, and white *Capri* pants that matched his pale skin. Frew casually tossed the comic book aside before lip-synching the first verse directly to the camera. Next, one by one, all four other White band members joined the action. Each guy sported remarkably big, intricately stylized hair, a clean-shaven face accentuated by subtle hints of makeup, and a slick-coloured high-fashion suit. Glass Tiger put its glossy New Romantic style on full display. Quartly filled most of the remaining screen time with shots of the band feigning a performance of the song. The director also captured Glass Tiger participating in a wedding ceremony that saw Frew join the woman with the pink glove in matrimony. Like the hetero-patriarchal romance comics that inspired it, the video for "Don't Forget Me (When I'm Gone)" encompassed pure adolescence: a contrived fantasy whose unlikeliness constituted part of its pleasure.¹⁰² Quartly designed the advertisement to mirror those melodramatic comics and stoke the desires of straight young teen women in Canada.

¹⁰¹ Glass Tiger created two music videos for "Don't Forget Me (When I'm Gone)." The video described in this paragraph represented the first version that played throughout Canada in 1986 and 1987. Glass Tiger produced another video for "Don't Forget Me (When I'm Gone)" to suit the demands of its American record company, EMI, which despised the original one. The United States version featured a simple feigned live performance.

¹⁰² In particular, *Romantic Secrets*, published by Fawcett Comics from 1949 to 1964, brimmed with hetero-patriarchal stories. Cultural historian Michelle Nolan reflected: "I still get depressed thinking about having to read the often ludicrous but usually well-illustrated stories in Fawcett romance comics of 1948-1953, in which the women almost invariably are portrayed as selfish, brainless, thoughtless or some other negative quality until shown the error of their ways by a man." Michelle Nolan, *Love on the Racks: A History of American Romance Comics* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2008), 3.

Critics monitored Glass Tiger's video for "Don't Forget Me (When I'm Gone)" to assess whether the Newmarket quintet genuinely exemplified rock music in Canada. In 1986, the discourse of embodied authenticity favoured slim and fit people. Some music journalists proved merciless in their critiques of Glass Tiger. "The worst is the singer," one critic wrote acerbically, referring to Alan Frew. "His face is fat. It shouldn't be, and I heard the record company forced him to go on a diet 'cause he's disgusting the people who should like him."¹⁰³ Although Capitol Records denied the verity of that report, Frew did successfully complete a weight loss program that summer.¹⁰⁴ Canadian music journalists who indulged in this rock fitness discourse demanded that Glass Tiger's corporeality adhere to the contemporary expectations of consumer society for band members to qualify as authentic rock music performers. This line of reasoning exemplified the collapse of cultural production into the logic of late capitalism that characterized postmodernism. Bodies became part and parcel of the consumerism surrounding the sound recording industry. The Newmarket quintet felt obliged to maintain an attractive profile as it embarked upon live concerts in support of *The Thin Red Line*.

Calculated touring constituted a vital component of Glass Tiger's music business strategy. "Management feels it's important to be an opening act for as long as possible to keep pressure off the band, and to allow a young band to mature," Wayne Parker explained.¹⁰⁵ Considering that the Newmarket quintet had never played a gig outside of

¹⁰³ This quote is from an anonymous video review that *Graffiti* magazine originally published in May 1986. The author found it reprinted in: Craig MacInnis, "Why They've Put Jock into Rock," *The Toronto Star*, 9 May 1986, sec. Entertainment.

¹⁰⁴ Stern, "Glass Tiger in the Big Leagues."

¹⁰⁵ Elissa Barnard, "Glass Tiger Reflect on Their Success," *The Chronicle Herald*, 27 May 1986, sec. Entertainment.

Ontario, it seemed sensible to expose Glass Tiger to as many crowds as possible before risking its own concerts as headliners. Consequently, the group spent most of *The Thin Red Line* touring cycle tightening its stage presentation as openers for other more established recording artists.¹⁰⁶ Glass Tiger shows represented complex exhibitions that served a host of purposes for a variety of people. Concerts offered opportunities for the band to display its skills, connect with fans, promote record sales and generate other related revenue. They also formed popular cultural events that Canadian music journalists routinely reported on to both inform and expand their readership.

Music journalists assessed whether Glass Tiger's live performances qualified as proper incarnations of rock music primarily by noting the age and gender composition of the audience. "From the dawn of rock 'n' roll, there has been a steady stream of questionable talents who have enjoyed fame by going for what is commonly called the little girl audience," critic James Muretich opined.¹⁰⁷ Muretich voiced a pervasive tenet of the discourse of communal authenticity that positioned young women's bodies as incapable of music connoisseurship and, therefore, susceptible to buying recorded sounds created by handsome male bodies lacking the genuine ability to rock, known otherwise as teen idols. By 1986, Canada had proven itself a hotbed of heartthrobs, including current New Romantic sensation Platinum Blonde. With its harmless flirtatious look and comfortable sweet sound, Glass Tiger seemed poised to replace that flashy Toronto foursome as the country's premier teen idols. Tens of thousands of young women flocked

¹⁰⁶ In Canada, on several different tours, Glass Tiger opened for the likes of Honeymoon Suite, Julian Lennon, Tom Cochrane, Lawrence Gowan, and Luba. The band also opened for Journey on its American tour in the fall of 1986 and for Tina Turner during her spring 1987 European tour. Glass Tiger, however, did headline some North American Fairs and Exhibitions in the summers.

¹⁰⁷ James Muretich, "Pop-Rock Acts Lack Creativity," *Calgary Herald*, 31 March 1986, sec. Entertainment.

to Glass Tiger shows when the band toured across the country in support of *The Thin Red Line*. Canadian music press coverage described how these teenage ticket holders would scream, dance, sing along, toss love letters and personal items on stage, make warm-hearted signs or banners to hold, and generally enjoy themselves. Such intense adulation thrilled Glass Tiger, yet the ensemble understood the potential repercussions of retaining “the little girl audience.” If the past gave any indication, fans would be remarkably fleeting and communal authenticity would remain terribly elusive. The Newmarket quintet countered this teen-dream narrative by adamantly pointing out time and again that young men also came out to its shows. “Our audience is more diverse than we’re usually given credit for,” Sam Reid declared defensively. “We definitely don’t want to be thought of as an all-girl band. We like to think of ourselves as serious musicians.”¹⁰⁸ The discourse of communal authenticity made Glass Tiger’s rock music status dependent upon the gender composition of its audience. And the band knew it.

On 10 November 1986, at the annual Juno Awards, members of the Canadian Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences (CARAS) celebrated the exceptional commercial success of Glass Tiger’s *The Thin Red Line*. The ensemble’s international achievements impressed CARAS even more than the 200,000 LPs the New Romantic group sold in Canada. Hard work on strategic promotional tours of the United States and Europe sparked significant interest in Glass Tiger’s wholesome New Romantic sound abroad. For instance, in the highly coveted American market, the band sold nearly half a

¹⁰⁸ Deirdre Kelly, “Glass Tiger Not Just a Group for Screaming Girls: Band Working up to a New Album,” *The Globe and Mail*, 10 September 1987, sec. Entertainment. Alan Frew also argued that Glass Tiger’s enjoyed a more gender-balanced audience than generally understood. See: Marie-France Rémillard, “Glass Tiger À La Conquête Des États-Unis,” *Live: Le journal rock*, July 1986.

million units in just a few months.¹⁰⁹ CARAS honoured the Newmarket quintet's contributions to the recording industry with three major Juno Award trophies that night: Most Promising Group of the Year, Single of the Year, and the preeminent Album of the Year – beating out Platinum Blonde's *Alien Shores*. Glass Tiger appeared giddy from all the music Establishment's adulation. "This is great," Alan Frew commented to the press, after the show. "Last year, we couldn't even get tickets to the Junos."¹¹⁰ Even with such exhilarating accolades, hard work lay ahead for the fellows in the Newmarket outfit as the New Romantic movement they emulated soon petered out fast in Canada.

Conclusion

From 1984 to 1986, a multifaceted discourse about authenticity regulated the New Romantic music of Platinum Blonde and Glass Tiger, as well as the bodies that created and consumed it. More often than not the ascription of authenticity rested on the proper citation and performance of hetero-patriarchal norms and practices. This chapter detailed how a gender binary consolidated along culturally organized lines of coherence, despite presenting itself as natural, guided the discourse about authenticity in Canada. This binary relation featured a privileged masculine position that differentiated itself from an undesirable feminine opposite.¹¹¹ Music journalists argued that only serious musicians who penned intelligent, meaningful lyrics made real rock music. Those with questionable

¹⁰⁹ "RIAA - Gold & Platinum Searchable Database," accessed 23 May 2015, <http://www.riaa.com/goldandplatinumdata>. Also, in January 1987, Glass Tiger garnered a Grammy Award nomination for best new artist.

¹¹⁰ Tim O'Connor, "Glass Tiger Sweeps Junos," *The Globe and Mail*, 11 November 1986, sec. Entertainment.

¹¹¹ Though, as philosopher Judith Butler finds in the work of Jacques Derrida and Luce Irigaray, whatever supposedly falls outside the binary is also produced by it as a set of exclusions presented as being external, despite actually residing within the binary. These exclusions emerge as incoherence, disruption, or even as a dire threat to the binary system itself. Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 39.

talent and banal lyrical content merely created pop music for the indiscriminating masses. Critics ultimately judged the New Romantic music of Platinum Blonde and Glass Tiger by the composition of the audience it attracted. Because manliness had long been conflated with rock connoisseurship, music journalists treated the primarily teen woman fan base of the two bands as a major problem in need of fixing. Platinum Blonde and Glass Tiger had to have more young men at their shows, and buying their records, for critics to consider them as authentic creators of rock music in Canada. Historical analysis of the discourse about authenticity lays bare the hetero-patriarchal social order of Canada in the mid-1980s. Whiteness, though, hid in plain sight, functioning as an unarticulated presupposition for rock authenticity.

Furthermore, this chapter demonstrated that Platinum Blonde and Glass Tiger characterized a postmodernist moment in Canadian popular culture. Pioneers of the New Romantic movement had used music video to question the boundaries between reality and artificiality long before the launching of MuchMusic in 1984. Nevertheless, when “The Nation’s Music Station” started broadcasting videos around the clock that featured highly stylized performers pretending to play their latest songs in a brazen effort to garner celebrity, the cultural condition of postmodernism hit mainstream Canada. Platinum Blonde and Glass Tiger both encompassed pure image. By adopting trendy extravagant looks and styles that did not connect to a message in some meaningful way, they epitomized “a new kind of superficiality in the most literal sense.”¹¹² As the growing backlash against New Romantic rock indicated, Canada’s own roots rock revival appeared at hand.

¹¹² Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 9.

Appendix 1.1: Lyrics for Platinum Blonde's "Doesn't Really Matter"

It's been a hard day in the city
It affects you in the most peculiar way
A dull day don't seem so pretty
We've said all that there is to say
And if you were to ask me questions
You don't really want to know
Your concern is just for show

Your name's a number, just press a button
Your memories lost but they've not forgotten
They try to break our lust for passion
They try to tell us that it's not in fashion
And if you were to ask me questions
What are we fighting for?
We're just breaking down the door

It doesn't really matter to me
I've been through this all before
It doesn't really matter

They fight in England and Northern Ireland
The police they try to hold us still
They can bleed us and they can feed us
But you know they'll never control our will
And if you were to ask that question
What are we fighting for?
We're just breaking down the door

It doesn't really matter to me
I've been through this all before
It doesn't really matter
It doesn't really matter to me
I've been through this all before
It doesn't really matter

Appendix 1.2: Lyrics for Platinum Blonde's "Take It From Me"

Could this be real, it's not a dream
I'm not in touch with the same old scene
Won't break my heart to sacrifice
Tomorrow lies for a higher price
You took my heart and you turned it into heat
Then you chewed it up and threw it in the street

Say goodbye to all the girls who want to hold your hand
That kind of girl is yesterday, she's no longer in demand
You took my heart and you turned it into heat
And then you chewed it up and threw it in the street

I never wanted, you never wanted love
But you take it from me.
I never wanted, you never wanted love
But you take it from me.

I could sleep for a thousand years
I would never share
We can't go on pretending
We would never dare

I never wanted, you never wanted love
But you take it from me.
I never wanted, you never wanted love
But you take it from me.

Appendix 1.3: Lyrics for Platinum Blonde's "Not In Love"

I found your picture hangin' on the back of my door
Won't give you my heart
No one lives there anymore
You said we're lovers
We could never be friends
Fascination ends
Here we go again
'Cause it's hot inside, when you coming home
'Cause it's hot inside, isn't that enough

I'm not in love
I'm not in love
I'm not in love

Could it be that time has taken it's toll
Won't take you so far, I am in control
You said we're lovers
We could never be friends
Fascination ends
Here we go again
'Cause it's hot inside, when you coming home
'Cause it's hot inside, isn't that enough

I'm not in love
I'm not in love
I'm not in love
We are not in love
No, no, no, no, no

Appendix 1.4: Lyrics for Platinum Blonde's "Crying Over You"

Crying, crying over you

Intensify security
Break the chains that hold me down
No chance for sanity around here
Cause I ain't gonna be your fool no more

Another mask of innocence
You hide away for convenience
It's just a change of attitude oh yeah, yeah
Cause I ain't gonna be your fool no more

Cause I ain't crying, crying over you
All you ever want me to do
Crying over you

You never seem to state your case
You always make me lose it, lose it
I'm getting tired of running the race oh yeah, yeah
Cause I ain't gonna be your fool no more

Cause I ain't crying, crying over you
All you ever want me to do
Crying over you

Nothing's gonna change my direction
Cause I ain't gonna cry
Crying, crying over you
All you ever want me to do
Crying over you, oh no, oh no

Appendix 1.5: Lyrics for Glass Tiger's "Don't Forget Me (When I'm Gone)"

You take my breath away, oh
Love thinks it's here to stay, oh
There's still so much for me to do
And I can't stop loving you
Oh, can this be true?

If you could see what I have seen, oh
Broken hearts and broken dreams, oh
Then I wake up, and you're not there
Pain finds me everywhere
Oh, but you don't care

Don't forget me when I'm gone
My heart would break
I have loved you for so long
It's all I can take

You, you take my breath away, oh
Love thinks it's here to stay, oh
There's still so much for me to do
And I can't stop loving you
Oh, can this be true?

Don't forget me when I'm gone
My heart would break
I have loved you for so long
It's all I can take

Then I wake up, and you're not there
Pain finds me everywhere
Oh, but you don't care

Don't forget me when I'm gone
For heaven's sake
I have loved you for so long
There's nothin' wrong
So don't forget me when I'm gone
My heart would break
I have loved you for so long
There's nothin' wrong

Chapter Two: Roots Rock Revival, 1987-1989

Folkloric notions of “roots music” authorized successive modes of commercial sound recording products during the twentieth century.¹ By the 1920s, through a process historian Karl Hagstrom Miller identified as segregating sound, Americans developed a popular music colour line: Black people performed Black music and White people performed White music. Record company catalogues started featuring “race” and “hillbilly” categories. The ascendant folklore paradigm suggested that their respective roots in African American and rural White folk practices and forms grounded these racialized genres. “In an age when social standing, cultural continuity, and economic stability were up for grabs, folklore offered a portrait of fixed and distinguishable racial cultures deeply rooted in history,” Miller argued.² Segregating sound represented a cultural component of the Jim Crow regime. It linked music, race, and geography in novel ways. The folklore paradigm understood pure musical roots as the vital essence of distinct racial and regional cultures. Following suit, record companies marketed and canonized “blues” and “country” music as specialized lines of folk recordings, separate

¹ The term “roots music” constituted a late-twentieth-century invention. Before then, folklorists and others often spoke of “local,” “regional,” “traditional,” “standard,” or even “legendary” music when referring to what are now called folk songs.

² Karl Hagstrom Miller, *Segregating Sound: Inventing Folk and Pop Music in the Age of Jim Crow* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 3.

from the White urban “mainstream” pop music of the day, and meant for specific audiences over-determined by ideas of race, class, and geography.³

In the mid-1960s, when rock surfaced as a distinct genre, most leading practitioners relied upon so-called roots music to give the cultural form some legitimacy. Claiming origins in both blues and country music empowered rock’s assertion of folk art authenticity. Rock ideology, in conjunction with the prevailing folklore paradigm, held that roots music constituted a reservoir for the basic character of unique racial and regional cultures. Rock’s reverence for the blues proved especially instructive in this regard. The timeworn figure of the lone Black Delta bluesman, equipped with his trusty guitar and gritty voice, formed a particularly potent symbol of genuineness to a multitude of White rock artists. “Here was the real thing: oppressed powerlessness turned to strength by the alchemy of song,” writer Ruth Padel noted, describing the allure of African American bluesmen to the discourse about rock authenticity.⁴ By anchoring rock in the blues, proponents of the emerging genre helped distinguish it from mere money making entertainment. This situation also demonstrated the extent to which the echoing of Black performance remained a crucial part of White identity in both the United States and Canada. By the late 1960s, weary of psychedelic excess, some rock artists – most notably Bob Dylan, The Byrds, The Band, and, later on, the Eagles – added a country feel to their sound that supposedly guided rock back to its “true roots.”⁵ Despite having a long-standing history of African American supporters and performers, people still broadly thought of country music as a cultural expression of White agrarian experiences

³ Barry Mazor, *Ralph Peer and the Making of Popular Roots Music* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2014), 6.

⁴ Ruth Padel, *I’m a Man: Sex, Gods, and Rock “N” Roll* (London: Faber and Faber, 2000), 205.

⁵ John Einarson, *Desperados: The Roots of Country Rock* (New York: Cooper Square Press, 2000), 100.

in Anglo-America.⁶ Country music provided yet another avenue through which roots-influenced rock produced and maintained Whiteness as it sought authentication.

The term “roots rock” entered the mainstream popular music lexicon during the mid-1980s.⁷ It referred to a fresh take on music largely born of a growing dissatisfaction with New Romantic rock groups, which dominated American and Canadian airwaves at the time with their glossy synthetic sound and flashy androgynous looks. Leading roots rock bands back then took influence from a range of sources, including folk, country, blues, and, in the case of Blue Rodeo, even jazz. They emulated the seminal recordings of several iconic artists from decades past, recouping rock’s origins in the process. In Canada, roots rock signalled a deliberate departure from the prevailing New Romantic sound, yet one that materialized as a return to form. Canadian rock music, then, found authenticity in its own reinvention.

This chapter outlines the dawning of a roots rock revival in Canada during the late 1980s, paying specific attention to the rise of three prominent bands within that diverse alternative movement – Blue Rodeo, The Tragically Hip, and Cowboy Junkies – as well as the fall of Platinum Blonde from the rarefied commercial heights of the New Romantic trend. Blue Rodeo put a contemporary spin on rockabilly, twisting country music to meet its own creative needs. The Toronto-based quintet established itself in 1987 as one of the leaders of the domestic roots rock revival. Meanwhile, Platinum Blonde struggled to reinvent itself as a funk-rock outfit. Canadian music journalists and consumers resisted embracing the group’s dramatically new sound and look. The Tragically Hip, yet another

⁶ Diane Pecknold, “Country Music and Racial Formation,” in *Hidden in the Mix: The African American Presence in Country Music* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 2.

⁷ Vladimir Bogdanov, ed., *All Music Guide to the Blues: The Definitive Guide to the Blues* (Ann Arbor: AMG, 2003), 723.

all-male ensemble from the Lake Ontario region, rejected the synthesizer-driven New Romanticism of the era and took musical inspiration from 1960s British blues rock instead. Cowboy Junkies gave the roots rock revival a boost in 1988, when its second LP challenged conventional sound recording practices and wisdom. The minimalist quintet transformed blues and country music classics into slow, hushed original-sounding pieces. This chapter traces both continuity and change within the discourse about authenticity during the onset of a roots rock revival. Hetero-patriarchy persisted as a factor underlying the discussions of what constituted real rock music in Canada at the time. Hegemonic understandings of gender and sexuality surfaced repeatedly in the discourse about authenticity, especially with regard to Margo Timmins of Cowboy Junkies. The roots rock revival, nevertheless, brought issues of race to the forefront, modifying the parameters for deliberating about genuineness, and revealing the construction of Whiteness in the process.

The Roots of Blue Rodeo

Greg Keelor and fellow Blue Rodeo co-founder Jim Cuddy spent several years finding a musical direction. “Everything becomes a fashion after a while and there’s a tendency for the roots of music to get lost through generations,” Keelor explained in June of 1987. “But there are always people rediscovering their roots and making good music. I just want Blue Rodeo to be among them.”⁸ At thirty-two years of age, with nearly a decade of experience in the music industry, Keelor felt a direct correlation between understanding his origins and “making good music.” Nine years before that interview, however, when

⁸ James Muretich, “Nashville Not on the Mind of Rock-Roots Guitar-Picker,” *Calgary Herald*, 12 June 1987, sec. Entertainment.

he and Cuddy reconnected after attaining undergraduate university degrees separately, the duo struggled to find their way in the post-punk soundscape. In the early 1980s, after failing to become new wave rock stars in Toronto, Keelor and Cuddy moved to New York City to make it in show business there as the pop outfit Fly To France. When that band fell apart, the pair bought acoustic guitars and started rediscovering their roots.⁹ Keelor and Cuddy met another transplanted artist in the Big Apple, innovative country singer-guitarist-songwriter Ned Sublette, whose honest and upfront compositions and courageous instrumental experimentation exhilarated them. “The name Blue Rodeo was inspired by Ned Sublette’s idea of modernizing cowboy music,” Cuddy confided years later. “It was a pretty alternative idea and we thought since we were deciding to be alternative, why not have a psychedelic cowboy name?”¹⁰ Nonetheless, by 1984, Keelor had grown disenthralled with New York and, much to Cuddy’s chagrin, the duo headed back to Toronto that summer.

Greg Keelor and Jim Cuddy returned to Canada aiming to make Blue Rodeo a reality. The two honed their songwriting skills and brought together other musicians open to creating a laid-back country-tinged sound.¹¹ Ultimately, the band wanted to be a really good live roots rock act, build up a reputation in the local clubs, and earn a living as players, with or without a recording contract.¹² Its timing proved fortuitous as country experienced a comeback in Canadian music circles during the mid-1980s. Strong live performances quickly made Blue Rodeo darlings of the fickle Queen Street West scene in

⁹ Perry Stern, “Blue Rodeo: Thriving on Pop’s Outskirts,” *Canadian Musician*, April 1988.

¹⁰ Tina Clarke, “Renegades and Romantics,” *Rock Express*, June 1988.

¹¹ Blue Rodeo’s original line-up featured Greg Keelor and Jim Cuddy with Cleave Anderson on drums, Bazil Donovan playing bass guitar, and Bobby Wiseman on keyboards.

¹² Richard Flohil, “Blue Rodeo: Un groupe extrêmement occupé à l’orée d’un succès international éclatant,” *Compositeur canadien*, February 1988.

Toronto, the epicentre of the Canadian sound recording industry. In 1986, the group joined the roster of Risque Disque, an independent domestic record label, and started preparing material for its debut album. Blue Rodeo caught the attention of executives at Warner Music Canada later that same year. Still, the major record company hesitated signing the group to a production and worldwide distribution deal until January 1987, when the Foundation Assisting Canadian Talent on Recordings came through with federal government funding covering approximately half the proposed \$150,000 budget for Blue Rodeo's first album and a couple of inexpensive accompanying music videos.¹³ The Canadian government used financial support of the arts to bolster a national popular culture, ostensibly protecting it from the deleterious effects of neoliberal globalization.

Blue Rodeo released *Outskirts* in March 1987 with limited fanfare. The discourse of sonic authenticity, nevertheless, set about categorizing the Toronto quintet's debut LP. Putting a label on *Outskirts* proved difficult for Canadian music journalists because, instead of limiting itself to one particular sound on the record, Blue Rodeo subtly embraced and pastiched country, blues, and jazz elements with straight-ahead pop and psychedelic-imbued rock. Though, of all the musical influences on display, the country component sounded most pronounced and drew intense scrutiny from critics. "This is more a flirtation with country than any real commitment to it," critic Evelyn Erskine observed.¹⁴ Which suggested to Erskine that Blue Rodeo might have rode the country bandwagon just to garner record sales. The Toronto ensemble repeatedly located itself firmly in the roots rock revival camp, placing its sound in the same field as The Byrds, Buffalo Springfield, The Band, or Country Joe And The Fish. Music journalists

¹³ Stern, "Blue Rodeo: Thriving on Pop's Outskirts."

¹⁴ Evelyn Erskine, "Rock," *The Ottawa Citizen*, 16 April 1987, sec. Weekender.

participated in the discourse of sonic authenticity as they determined whether Blue Rodeo's sound displayed enough originality to qualify as real rock music in 1987. Critics penned mixed reviews of *Outskirts*. A couple of them glowed but the majority did not.¹⁵ Tim O'Connor, for example, took issue with the album's material. "There's no stamp of individuality to distinguish Blue Rodeo from hundreds of other roots rockers," he informed readers. "If they had the musical heritage of a group like Los Lobos, they might have pulled it off."¹⁶ O'Connor felt that rock authenticity rested on sounding original and judged the Toronto quintet wanting.

The discourse of sonic authenticity also championed lyrical content that exhibited intelligence and seriousness. Blue Rodeo's *Outskirts* favourably impressed most Canadian music journalists in this regard. "The lyrics are often psychological in scope, set against a sweeping background of American mythology and urban intrigue," Craig MacInnis relayed. "Tension-filled and symbolic, much of it plays like cerebral film noir."¹⁷ Critics admired how the group sang about the darker side of life, cleverly describing a world littered with drugs, dashed dreams, death, and broken hearts. "I think that's a peculiar thing," mused Jim Cuddy, "because we're not a particularly dark band and the music isn't dark."¹⁸ The unusual fact that Blue Rodeo had two lead singers, who each wrote songs that reflected their different personalities and perspectives, gave *Outskirts* a broader thematic range. Greg Keelor tended to compose songs triggered by

¹⁵ Only two of the six album reviews of Blue Rodeo's *Outskirts* issued by the Canadian music press in 1987 extolled the LP.

¹⁶ Tim O'Connor, "Sharps & Flats," *The Chronicle Herald*, 30 April 1987, sec. Entertainment.

¹⁷ Craig MacInnis, "Blue Rodeo in It for Long Haul," *The Toronto Star*, 24 April 1987, sec. Entertainment.

¹⁸ Terry Burman, "Riding the Range with Blue Rodeo," *Stereo Guide*, February 1988.

reflective emotions. Cuddy, on the other hand, wrote around specific circumstances; literal events reduced to what he called “psychological fragments.”¹⁹

Canadian mainstream radio did not pick up Blue Rodeo’s first single from *Outskirts*: the title track written in empathy of drug casualty David Kennedy, son of murdered American political icon Bobby Kennedy. Already meagre album sales soon stalled. In June 1987, when Warner Music Canada tried to interest commercial radio in Blue Rodeo’s second single, “Try,” station programmers reacted dismally. Then MuchMusic put the video for it into high rotation. Soon after that, rock and country stations across Canada started adding the romantic ballad to their playlists. Slowly but surely “Try” climbed the *RPM* Top Singles chart, peaking at number six early in December that year.²⁰ Sales of *Outskirts* picked up substantially as a result. “Try” featured vintage rock instrumentation. The four-minute, unhurried sentimental song opened with the clean sound of a lightly strummed, old Gibson electric guitar. Ludwig acoustic drums proceeded to lay down the backbeat rhythmic foundation. Shortly thereafter, a pulsating percussion bass started bolstering the harmonic structure of the track. The classic tone of an aging Acetone keyboard supported verse and chorus segments while also filling out the solo section. Last but not least, delicate licks from an Epiphone Casino electric guitar punctuated “Try,” often acting as a melodic counterpoint to Jim Cuddy’s lead vocals. His high, keening tenor gave the track emotional heft, especially during a couple of choice moments when he employed falsetto.²¹ Hetero-

¹⁹ Flohil, “Blue Rodeo: Un groupe extrêmement occupé à l’orée d’un succès international éblouissant.”

²⁰ “RPM - Library and Archives Canada,” accessed 1 June 2016, <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/rpm>.

²¹ Not to suggest that falsetto should always be understood as a signifier of high emotion. Echoing the work of George McKay, this dissertation holds that falsetto has a range of meanings in rock music. George McKay, *Shakin’ All Over: Popular Music and Disability* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013), 61.

patriarchal romanticism animated the seemingly innocuous lyrics.²² The song told the woeful tale of a straight male protagonist tormented by the wiles of a particular woman. Throughout this lyrical jeremiad, the man infantilized her and repeatedly, strenuously urged her to try. Try and do what exactly? It remains unclear, though the onus definitely fell upon her to do something to ease *his* anguish.



Image 2.1: Blue Rodeo promotional photograph from 1987.²³

²² To view the lyrics for Blue Rodeo’s “Try,” please see Appendix 1.

²³ “Blue Rodeo.” Warner Music Canada Publicity Photograph. Canada: Warner Music Canada, 1987. Library and Archives Canada, *RPM fonds*. <http://collectionscanada.gc.ca> (accessed 14 January 2017). In the photograph, from left to right, stand Jim Cuddy, Greg Keelor, Basil Donovan, Cleave Anderson, and Bobby Wiseman.

The discourse of embodied authenticity helped determine which bodies genuinely epitomized rock music in Canada during the late 1980s. Blue Rodeo's nonchalant approach to its visual identity distinguished the ensemble. "Here's a band that, unlike most of their contemporaries, doesn't worry about contriving a physical image," music journalist Perry Stern wrote approvingly.²⁴ Many critics admired Blue Rodeo for making its presence felt through music not fashion. The Toronto quintet provided a stark contrast to New Romantic bands such as Glass Tiger, who commanded the airwaves and sold copious records in 1987, with its trendy big stylish hair, cosmetic use, and jet-set suits. Blue Rodeo garnered some embodied authenticity because its relaxed look aligned with the prevalent roots rock ideal of concentrating on the music and leaving vogue image concerns to poseurs. Be that as it may, Blue Rodeo still forged a visual identity. The music video for "Try" illustrates this point nicely.

Replete with richly textured and darkly hued cinematic shot sequences, the imaginative advertisement presented Blue Rodeo as serious rock musicians that cared deeply about their craft. Director Michael Buckley primarily featured the band in a sparsely lit performance space furnished with a wall clock and a couple of hanging industrial lights suspended above the group and its stage gear. Blue Rodeo extended this labour motif through its everyday street attire, consisting mostly of denim jeans and modest collared shirts with the sleeves rolled up. Plenty of shots focused up close on the pale-skinned, clean-shaven Jim Cuddy as he lip-synced the vocally challenging tune. Buckley interspersed a mixture of clips throughout the video that showed the other band members playing their respective instruments and exhibiting musical skills. The lengthy

²⁴ Stern, "Blue Rodeo: Thriving on Pop's Outskirts."

commercial encouraged viewers to build a picture of Blue Rodeo's corporeality, to register signs of its ability alongside markers of gender, sexuality, race, class, and age. Blue Rodeo presented itself as a genuine roots rock outfit that embodied rock authenticity. Though seemingly unconcerned with concocting a visual identity, the band actually delivered another set of images. The music video for "Try" echoed the logic of postmodern neoliberalism by totally conflating performance and promotion. The advertisement deconstructed the opposition between art and commerce that the discourse of folkloric authenticity championed so fervently.

"Everything's surpassed our wildest expectations," Greg Keelor confided, commenting on Blue Rodeo's recent flurry of fame.²⁵ Band members indicated they would have been happy if only their friends bought a copy of *Outskirts*. By April 1988, nevertheless, the album had reached platinum sales certification in Canada.²⁶ Awards and accolades piled up as well. The discourse of folkloric authenticity measured which performers properly managed commerce and technology in the creation of rock music during the late 1980s. It positioned autonomy as the ultimate criterion for negotiating neoliberal industrial capitalism in Canada. Jim Cuddy attributed Blue Rodeo's success to a deep-rooted sense of independence. The group refrained from cutting tracks until members felt they would have sufficient production oversight. "There's not a lot of room for artistic development in Canada," Cuddy noted. "We didn't want to lose any integrity by changing our sound to suit the recording industry."²⁷ The commercial article could never be the genuine article for Cuddy. Blue Rodeo resisted what the discourse of

²⁵ Nick Krewen, "Blue Rodeo Riding into Town," *The Hamilton Spectator*, 26 November 1987, sec. Entertainment.

²⁶ "Gold/Platinum," *Music Canada*, accessed 12 June 2016, <http://musiccanada.com/gold-platinum>.

²⁷ Deirdre Kelly, "Blue Rodeo Bucking for a Big Success," *The Globe and Mail*, 22 May 1987, sec. Entertainment.

folkloric authenticity proclaimed to be the devitalizing control of record companies. Yet, at the same time, the Toronto quintet utterly depended on the support, financial and otherwise, of Warner Music Canada to survive, let alone thrive, as Canadian roots rock artists. Since commercial imperatives governed all mass-mediated music, how Blue Rodeo appeared to handle them mattered most in the discourse of folkloric authenticity. Music journalists routinely credited the band members for being diligent journeymen in a business that preferred overnight sensations. The fact that some people in the group had not yet given up their day jobs, despite copious radio play and remarkable LP sales, gave the impression of a continued self-determination.²⁸ In reality, though, platinum record sales in Canada did not generate enough income for everyone in Blue Rodeo to live well off, especially those raising young families.²⁹ Job security in rock appeared precarious at best. Keeping regular employment proved a thoroughly pragmatic decision for many a Canadian musician.

Blue Rodeo promised Warner Music Canada that it would support the release of *Outskirts* by playing shows across the country. The quintet just did not specify how. Out of necessity the band developed a “Hit and Run Tour” mode for reaching a national

²⁸ Jim Cuddy worked as a set builder for a Toronto film company and Cleave Anderson had long been employed as a carrier with Canada Post. The author found this information detailed in: “Nightclub Notebook: Riding High,” *The Chronicle Herald*, 12 November 1987, sec. Entertainment; Craig MacInnis, “Rodeo Wrangling with Success,” *The Toronto Star*, 13 December 1987, sec. Entertainment; Leslie Smith, “Nightclub Notebook: Blue Rodeo Rounds up Hits,” *The Chronicle Herald*, 4 February 1988, sec. Entertainment; Helen Bullock, “Urbane Cowboys,” *The Toronto Star*, 10 September 1988, sec. Starweek; Canadian Press, “Toronto Band Blue Rodeo Warily Corralling Country Success,” *The Gazette*, 29 September 1988, sec. Entertainment; “Blue Rodeo Not Taking Any Chances: Hold down Second Jobs,” *The Guardian*, 30 September 1988, sec. tvScene; “Toronto Band Is Cynical despite Platinum,” *The Leader-Post*, 1 October 1988, sec. Entertainment; Gwen Dambrofsky, “Blue Rodeo’s Hot but Members Cool about Sudden Fame,” *The Hamilton Spectator*, 15 October 1988, sec. Entertainment; “Blue Rodeo: Won’t Give up Their Day Jobs,” *Calgary Herald*, 27 October 1988, sec. Beat.

²⁹ Jim Cuddy, Bazil Donovan, and Cleave Anderson each had wives and small children. Danielle Bonneau, “Blue Rodeo, Quatre fois à Montréal en un an,” *La Presse*, 18 March 1988, sec. Arts et spectacles.

audience.³⁰ That is, instead of packing the proverbial van and staying out on the road for months on end, Blue Rodeo would fly out of Toronto on a Thursday night, play three or four gigs in different major centres over the weekend, and then return home in time for work on Monday. Albeit somewhat exhausting and considerably expensive, this unorthodox touring method allowed Blue Rodeo to cover more ground than conventional methods while also providing a stable financial and emotional life for the family men in the band. “Baby will have shoes and daddy will rock,” Jim Cuddy assured one interviewer.³¹ The Toronto quintet’s “Hit and Run Tour” strategy flourished in Canada as its fan-base expanded coast to coast.

Blue Rodeo garnered reels of press coverage by playing about 175 gigs a year in 1987 and 1988. Music journalists evaluated collective communication during these concerts as part of the discourse of communal authenticity. Their attention focused on both performers and audience members, although for different but related reasons, to see if Blue Rodeo’s shows represented genuine incarnations of Canadian rock music. The band’s live show enthralled almost every critic. “It was a convincing, heartfelt performance that proved Blue Rodeo has more than just a chance to make their mark,” Mark LePage reported, after catching a show in Montréal, Québec.³² The band’s sincerity persuaded LePage of its communal authenticity. Music journalists commended Jim Cuddy and Greg Keelor’s complementary vocals and nimble roots rock guitar work. They praised Cleave Anderson and Bazil Donovan for delivering a steely, steady rhythm section. Keyboardist Bobby Wiseman’s indisputable skill and eccentric showmanship

³⁰ Stern, “Blue Rodeo: Thriving on Pop’s Outskirts.”

³¹ The Chronicle Herald, “Nightclub Notebook: Riding High.”

³² Mark LePage, “Blue Rodeo Wins over Crowd,” *The Gazette*, 1 June 1987, sec. Entertainment.

wowed crowds and drew incomparable critical acclaim. Craig MacInnis, for instance, described Wiseman's performance at Ontario Place in July 1988 this way:

Decked out in ragged khaki shorts and wearing nothing on his feet, the tiny keyboardist looked and behaved like an elf on an acid jag, kicking up his heels and firing off strange arpeggios till it seemed his hands would bleed. He's the most distinctive keyboard player in Canadian rock at the moment, blessed with the ability to turn songs on their side with incongruous solos and pretty piano figures.³³

Wiseman possessed unique capabilities. He could transform Blue Rodeo's conventional roots rock fare into unorthodox bits of improvisational jazz. Despite sporting a dishevelled appearance and diminutive stature, Wiseman commanded attentiveness on stage, making the keyboardist a frontman in his own right.

Music journalists also monitored those who attended Blue Rodeo's live shows. Critics often treated audience composition as a primary indicator of rock music credibility in Canada. Blue Rodeo claimed to pursue fans with its music rather than sex appeal, contrary to the well-worn path of many contemporary rockers. "I don't know if we're a sexy band," Jim Cuddy wondered candidly, "we don't try to be, but we're certainly a sweaty band. We really work out on a live show. And, it's true, the more popular our band gets, the more female the audience gets."³⁴ Even before the widespread success of "Try" started levelling the gender imbalance in its fan base, music journalists praised Blue Rodeo for attracting a diverse crowd with musical tastes that seemed as wide-ranging as the band's sound. Ticket holders varied greatly too, ranging from teenagers ready for dancing and university students into the so-called new country to urban professionals and adults with a more historical approach to rock. For critics, Blue

³³ Craig MacInnis, "A Little Try Is All It Takes to Lasso Blue Rodeo's Fans," *The Toronto Star*, 17 July 1988, sec. Entertainment.

³⁴ Bullock, "Urbane Cowboys."

Rodeo's ability to bring together and captivate disparate audiences of mostly men exemplified its skill in collective communication, its communal authenticity. After wrapping up a series of performances in November 1988, the Toronto ensemble headed back into the studio to record its sophomore LP. Blue Rodeo seemed poised for a major breakthrough as the roots rock revival it helped trigger in Canada gained traction. Former trend setting domestic recording artists adapted to the shifting popular music soundscape accordingly.

A Sound That We Call "Street Sleaze"

Platinum Blonde forged an entirely different sound on its pivotal third album, *Contact*. The band discarded its British New Romantic feel and adopted an American funk-inspired rock vibe instead. Mark Holmes said the vision for the record's overall sonic direction came about in late 1986, during a songwriting session in Los Angeles, California. Experimentations with "R&B blues riffs" sparked Platinum Blonde's White musical imaginations. "So we thought, what would it sound like if the Rolling Stones met the Ohio Players?" Holmes recounted. "We came up with this rock/funk hybrid idea and it was like we had found the Holy Grail."³⁵ Platinum Blonde wanted to augment its alabaster rock sound with just the right touch of Black roots music to catch the ear of mainstream White America. Following a persistent rock tradition, the band tapped into the wellspring of Black performance, and harnessed it to power *Contact*.

Recording sessions for Platinum Blonde's third LP started in the last few weeks of 1986 and continued piecemeal over the next several months in both American and

³⁵ Keith Sharp, "Star Privilege," *Rock Express*, November 1987.

Canadian studios. The efforts and talents of four producers, five engineers, seven vocalists, four guitarists, three bass players, four percussionists, four keyboardists, and a horn section combined to create the eleven tracks on *Contact*.³⁶ Chris Steffler, though, did not participate. Mark Holmes insisted that the drummer had willfully left the group to pursue a solo career. Steffler repeatedly stated that Holmes forced him out.³⁷ Regardless, Sascha Tukatsch took Steffler's spot and left his mark on the band's new funk-tinged sound. The expert and acutely expensive performances of several guest players enabled Platinum Blonde to take its self-styled notion of a rock-funk fusion to previously unimagined sonic realms. "We went into the sessions with a certain preconception and then things just kinda took a natural curve," Holmes related. "What we ended up with is a sound that we call 'street sleaze.'"³⁸ The bandleader framed the palpable influence of renowned Black musicians on the recording process as "natural" and related their contributions to a kind of urban vulgarity, suggesting that Holmes viewed African American artists through the lens of primitivism. Be that as it may, Canadian listeners discovered exactly what kind of music "street sleaze" constituted in the fall of 1987, when the group released its long-awaited third album.

The Canadian music press thought poorly of *Contact*. Critics faulted Platinum Blonde for producing derivative material. "Aside from the obvious – a saucy cover of the Ohio Players' funky 'Fire' – nearly everything on *Contact* has been heard before," one music journalist concluded.³⁹ The discourse of sonic authenticity prized rockers with an

³⁶ For a listing of all the names of these individuals, see Platinum Blonde's *Contact* liner credit notes.

³⁷ Personal problems between Mark Holmes and Sergio Galli reached a head at this time too. Consequently, Galli's future with Platinum Blonde seemed uncertain for a while during the spring of 1987. Holmes and Galli eventually solved the personal conflict they shared and the guitarist stayed in the lineup.

³⁸ Sharp, "Star Privilege."

³⁹ "Garage Days Revisited Real Bucket O' Fun," *The Guardian*, 6 November 1987, sec. The TV Guide.

original sound. Platinum Blonde appeared terribly repetitive, especially given the recent chart-topping success of Robert Palmer and Power Station, whose latest LPs had already favourably mixed rock with a little funk. Some critics questioned why the Toronto-based band would even want to dabble in funk. “Perhaps it is to prove there’s a white-hot soul lurking underneath that carefully coiffed, studiously lacquered rock image,” Craig MacInnis speculated cynically.⁴⁰ Sonic authenticity, as MacInnis articulated, rested in the ability to locate and voice a true inner being that lay hidden behind a false outer mask. Sincere expression of that genuine inner self revealed originality, a key principle of the ideal of authenticity.

Critical reviews also dealt with the racial component of Platinum Blonde’s latest LP. Though, rather than stating outright that *Contact* sounded somewhat Black, music journalists wrote euphemistically, claiming it constituted “a makeover in the R&B mode” or a turn “toward a more street-wise urban soul.”⁴¹ Canadian critics exhibited a consistent disinclination to deal with race overtly. Yet, their language clearly treated music styles as markers of distinct racial identities: rock represented a White cultural production and funk served as an African American one. Platinum Blonde’s incorporation of Black music into *Contact* demonstrated the extent to which the mirroring of Black performance remained a constituent part of Whiteness in Canada during the late 1980s. The Toronto outfit thought its newest sound rang true. “We all felt very strongly about going in this direction,” Mark Holmes declared on behalf of the band. “It feels good because it’s

⁴⁰ Craig MacInnis, “Molly Gives Alta Moda the Soul-Pop Push,” *The Toronto Star*, 9 October 1987, sec. Entertainment.

⁴¹ Helen Metella, “Songs Lag behind Musicianship: Platinum Blonde Changing Image, Sound,” *The Edmonton Journal*, 15 October 1987, sec. Arts & Entertainment; and Alan Niester, “The Music Is Mightier than the Pen for This Briton,” *The Globe and Mail*, 25 September 1987, sec. Entertainment. Music journalists employed euphemisms for race in thirteen more newspaper articles.

honest.”⁴² Platinum Blonde claimed sonic authenticity based on a sense of personal fidelity. Remarkably, these four White musicians from the Lake Ontario region flirted with funk freely and felt virtuous for doing so, betraying a special kind of innocence dear to the construction of Whiteness in Canada.

“Contact,” the title-track and initial single from the band’s much-anticipated third LP, encapsulated Platinum Blonde’s self-styled street sleaze sound. A bluesy bass line overdubbed with keyboards established the harmonic foundation. Heavy pulsating drums set a moderate pace for the Power Station-styled rock number. Bright syncopated electric guitar licks dotted the verses while riffs bolstered the chorus sections. “Contact” also featured a hefty electric guitar solo that included touches of whammy bar vibrato and ended on a brief upward key modulation. Piercing horn blasts peppered the tune, playing funky rhythmic and melodic accents throughout. The lyrics oozed raunchiness.⁴³ They detailed the lustfulness of a heterosexual adult male protagonist aggressively seeking carnal pleasure. This libertine repeatedly infantilized the women he found attractive. The central tension of the song’s steamy narrative lay in whether or not the woman he desired most would fornicate with him. At one point near the end of “Contact,” the male character’s pleas for sex turned ominous. “There’s no way around me, so give me a try,” Mark Holmes sang *seductively*. In effect, the lyrical content normalized the sexual coercion of women, further entrenching the hetero-patriarchal underpinning of Canadian society in the late 1980s. The vocal performances of Mark Holmes, Kenny MacLean, and two accomplished Black female back-up singers, B.J. Nelson and Michelle Cobbs, delivered the affect of the song’s provocative theme. As lead singer, Holmes maintained

⁴² Ted Davis, “Platinum Blonde: Musicians Behind The Make-Up,” *Canadian Musician*, October 1987.

⁴³ To view the lyrics for Platinum Blonde’s “Contact,” see Appendix 2.

the melody throughout “Contact” and provided the only improvisatory moments. MacLean’s backing vocals lent assistance to Holmes, serving to enlarge his lyrical statements both literally and figuratively. Nelson and Cobbs, for their part, broadened the soundscape of the choruses and reinforced the melodic hook that animated those sections. The duo also accentuated constructions of gender and sexuality integral to the single’s erotic motif. Their passionate background vocals relayed the pair’s embodiment. Producer David Bendeth positioned Nelson and Cobbs in support of a White male lead, embellishing his heterosexual appeal and reinforcing his manliness. Perhaps most significantly, the two singers seemingly validated the all-White rock group’s performance of African American-inspired music by lending Platinum Blonde a modicum of sonic authenticity with their Black-sounding vocals.⁴⁴

The video for “Contact” looked utterly libidinous. “We were always careful not to overplay the sex stuff on our first videos,” guitarist Sergio Galli divulged. “So this time we decided to show a little T and A and get people upset.”⁴⁵ Platinum Blonde actually removed some snippets of female nudity to make its extended commercial more palatable for television consumption. Still, the supple, fit, naked pale-skinned bodies of a young heterosexual couple in the throes of passion occupied plenty of screen time. These random clips of flesh fondling titillated the viewer. Several candid granular shots of scantily clad ladies-of-the-night working a city corner after dark also dotted the video, ramping up the sexual tension further. The lion’s share of the advertisement, nonetheless, transpired during twilight, in a large urban back alley performance space, one that neatly

⁴⁴ The analysis of back-up singing in this paragraph is heavily indebted to one article: Susan Fast, “Genre, Subjectivity and Back-up Singing in Rock Music,” in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Popular Musicology*, ed. Derek B. Scott (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 171–188.

⁴⁵ James Muretich, “Blonde Bombshell: Band Drops Teen-Pop for Funk-Rock Sound,” *Calgary Herald*, 7 October 1987, sec. Entertainment.

illustrated Platinum Blonde's self-named street sleaze sound. It encompassed quite a scene. Laundry hung from clotheslines strung between the rooftops of two old brick tenement buildings. A buff four-man topless horn section pretended to play its instruments while gyrating atop a fire escape that overlooked the action on the ground below. At street level, Platinum Blonde feigned an energetic performance of "Contact" amidst a couple of decrepit parked vehicles, some construction pylons, and big metal trash bins. Meanwhile, under the watchful eye of a stylish pimp, seven young strumpets dressed tantalizingly in black, danced sensually all around the band members. Sexual imbalance certainly ordered the video. Every woman delivered strong erotic signals and paraded about for the approval of heterosexual men. The fellows in Platinum Blonde, on the other hand, wore everyday blue-collar attire and displayed powerful control over their own sexualized bodies. Band members seemed to have attained a promise of rock stardom: the conversion of artistic appeal into sexual capital.



Image 2.2: Platinum Blonde promotional photograph from 1987.⁴⁶

Platinum Blonde drastically altered its image for *Contact*. The discourse of embodied authenticity monitored the group's visual changes. Members of the Canadian music press demanded an explanation of this striking metamorphosis. "We were really sick of that pretty boy image," Kenny MacLean responded. "We're not like that normally – we like to let our hair down and our beards grow a bit. And we like to wear leather jackets and jeans. The whole Platinum Blonde image was just getting in the way of what we wanted to do musically."⁴⁷ Dressing up glamorously had led the band astray both personally and professionally. In the summer of 1986, months before recording *Contact*,

⁴⁶ "Platinum Blonde." Epic Records cover image for American version of *Contact*. United States: Epic Records, 1987. 45cat.com. <http://www.45cat.com/record/3407606> (accessed 14 January 2017). In the photograph, from left to right, stand Sascha Tukatsch, Mark Holmes, Kenny MacLean, and Sergio Galli.

⁴⁷ Davis, "Platinum Blonde: Musicians Behind The Make-Up."

Platinum Blonde set about jettisoning its New Romantic, “pretty boy” image. Band members quit bleaching their hair blond, stopped applying facial cosmetics, and totally revamped their wardrobes. A homophobic element clearly animated this transformation. “It wasn’t cool for guys to like the Blondes because they looked like a bunch of faggots with blonde hair,” MacLean revealed, “and their girlfriends liked us.”⁴⁸ Platinum Blonde might have been reacting to a larger backlash against androgyny in rock music happening at the time.⁴⁹ Be that as it may, Platinum Blonde adapted its visual identity between LPs. Markers of toughness and maturity replaced signs of delicacy and adolescence. Only time would tell if this transparent move to garner older heterosexual men as fans worked.

Launching a Canadian tour in support of *Contact* proved incredibly difficult for Platinum Blonde. In spite of a reasonably successful first single⁵⁰ and selling nearly 150,000 copies of the funk-tinged rock album in Canada, poor advance ticket sales forced the band to scrap a series of concerts scheduled to start in late January 1988. Critics lost the opportunity to assess Platinum Blonde’s communal authenticity. News that one of Canada’s best-selling rock groups had to cancel a number of shows amused the country’s music press. “It’s enough to turn Platinum Blonde grey,” one critic remarked wryly.⁵¹ With no dates confirmed in Montréal or Québec and the winter Olympics in Calgary preventing the band from lining up gigs out west, embarking on a poorly attended tour of the Maritimes and Ontario would have bankrupted the band. Platinum Blonde’s manager,

⁴⁸ Mike Mannix and Alastair Sutherland, “Platinum Update: Dinner with the Unknown Blonde,” *Graffiti*, August 1986.

⁴⁹ Music historian Theo Cateforis discussed this backlash in: Theo Cateforis, *Are We Not New Wave?: Modern Pop at the Turn of the 1980s* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 233.

⁵⁰ Platinum Blonde’s “Contact” peaked at number thirteen on the RPM Top 100 Singles Chart in late November 1987. “RPM - Library and Archives Canada.”

⁵¹ Canadian Press, “Rock Group Cancels Tours,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, 22 January 1988, sec. Entertainment. The Canadian music press published nine more articles that related the news of Platinum Blonde’s cancelled shows.

Bruce Barrow, explained that with a planned line-up of ten musicians on stage, the predicted costs of touring in support of *Contact* tallied high.⁵² Nonetheless, shortly after Platinum Blonde announced these concert cancellations, Mark Holmes floated an alternative justification for abandoning the tour. “That was a fishy story to begin with about ticket sales,” the lead singer declared. “The real reason is due to certain personal things within the group. Basically, it’s cleaning up acts. There’s so much to be said for being healthy, staying away from drugs and booze and all sorts of things.”⁵³ Though not mentioned outright by Holmes, newspapers reported that Kenny MacLean had trouble keeping sober. Ever protective of Platinum Blonde’s brand, Holmes tried to reframe the embarrassing cancellations as an autonomous act of altruism. He attempted to claim folkloric authenticity amid commercial failure, apparently in exchange for MacLean’s dignity.

“La vie n’est pas rose non plus pour Platinum Blonde,” music journalist Danielle Bonneau observed in May 1988, stating the obvious.⁵⁴ After taking months off to regroup and strategize, the Toronto outfit finally set out on a summer tour of Canada, but the venues and stage show had downsized, audiences paled in comparison to former years, and music press coverage waned tremendously.⁵⁵ Platinum Blonde’s street sleaze sound and mature, working-class look alienated a majority of its teen followers. The twenty-

⁵² David Farrell, “Blondes’ Manager Confronts Rumours,” *The Record*, 14 March 1988.

⁵³ Tim O’Connor, “Platinum Blonde Cleaning up Its Act,” *The Ottawa Citizen*, 9 March 1988, sec. Entertainment. Critics printed versions of this article in six other different Canadian newspapers.

⁵⁴ Translation by author: “Life is not rosy anymore for Platinum Blonde.” Danielle Bonneau, “Un repli stratégique pour Platinum Blonde,” *La Presse*, 13 May 1988, sec. Arts et spectacles.

⁵⁵ The *Contact* press cycle produced only one concert review and one concert preview. Additionally, four articles in a range of newspapers and one magazine covered nineteen-year-old Mary Louise Pace, a fervent Platinum Blonde fan battling cancer. Pace’s dream to one day meet Mark Holmes and be serenaded by him came true in June 1988 at the band’s concert in Halifax, Nova Scotia. This charitable act comprised one of many that Platinum Blonde performed as professional recording artists.

something male fan base the ensemble sought never materialized. On the pivotal American front, the band's exorbitant expenditures to breakthrough there failed miserably. The end for Platinum Blonde as recording artists in Canada seemed imminent.

Baby Blue

The Tragically Hip hailed from the old Loyalist settlement of Kingston, Ontario. Band members – bassist Gord Sinclair, lead guitarist Rob Baker, drummer Johnny Fay, rhythm guitarist Paul Langlois, and lead singer Gordon Downie – had played together in various incarnations there since high school. A shared love of Sixties British blues-inspired rock finally drew them all into one group during the early 1980s.⁵⁶ No concerted effort to revive any music genre in particular motivated them, however. “But like a lot of other kids, we went around checking out clubs and kinda got sick of the Duran Duran keyboard thing,” Gord Sinclair recalled later.⁵⁷ Fed up with the synthesizer-driven New Romanticism that saturated Canadian airwaves at the time, The Tragically Hip turned to roots rock for musical guidance. When it came time to pick a name for the band, the quintet decided to adopt a phrase they liked from popular music culture that cropped up every now and then. A satirical skit from the 1981 comedy video compilation *Elephant Parts* featured a character that solicited donations for a Foundation for the Tragically Hip. The expression “tragically hip” also appeared in the lyrics for Elvis Costello’s “Town Cryer,” the closing track on his 1982 landmark album *Imperial Bedroom*. With three band members taking undergraduate studies at Queen’s University, The Tragically Hip started out playing local bars just on weekends for fun and to make some extra cash.

⁵⁶ To be accurate, Paul Langlois did not join the band’s line-up until the fall of 1985. Before then, seasoned saxophonist David Manning formed part of the group.

⁵⁷ Greg Barr, “Club Saw: Artistic Diversity,” *The Ottawa Citizen*, 20 May 1988, sec. Now!

Then, much to the detriment of their higher education, gigs began seeping into weekdays, as the roots rock group became the toast of Kingston over a couple of years.⁵⁸

The Tragically Hip's music industry breakthrough encompassed a combination of talent and dumb luck. In the summer of 1986, the band recorded five songs on a cheap home tape deck, as crude a demo as anyone could imagine, and gave it to the group's road manager. He then passed it on to his brother-in-law, who gave it to his friend and powerhouse political pollster Allan Gregg, who just happened to be business partners with Toronto-based rock manager Jake Gold. "I heard the tape in Allan's car on the way to a ball game," Gold remembered. "We were really enthusiastic about it."⁵⁹ After seeing the group play live in Toronto, Gregg and Gold hammered out a management deal with The Tragically Hip over beers in a smoky tavern. The initial business plan involved strategically establishing grassroots band loyalty outside of Kingston by continually touring southern Ontario urban centres. Eventually, in May 1987, with the help of producer Ken Greer of Red Rider fame, The Tragically Hip taped seven songs in a Toronto recording studio for a bare bone eponymous EP: known to band members simply as *Baby Blue*, in reference to the memorable colour of the record cover. Management then shopped that EP around to some major labels that fall. RCA Canada offered the best distribution deal. The Kingston quintet seemed to have landed a ticket out of obscurity.

In January 1988, when RCA Canada released The Tragically Hip's self-titled EP nationwide, the discourse of sonic authenticity set about categorizing the ensemble's sound. Canadian music journalists clearly saw The Tragically Hip as a roots rock outfit that emulated Sixties British blues-inspired rock legends. Critics routinely praised *Baby*

⁵⁸ Gord Sinclair still managed to acquire an undergraduate degree in history. Rob Baker graduated too, having attained a bachelor of fine arts.

⁵⁹ Maureen Littlejohn, "The Tragically Hip: The (not So) Tragic Story," *Canadian Musician*, June 1988.

Blue for sounding “rootsy” and fittingly reminiscent of rock luminaries such as the Yardbirds or Rolling Stones.⁶⁰ “If there are any flaws, it is that these influences can at times be too transparent,” Evelyn Erskine reported in dissent.⁶¹ The Tragically Hip needed to display its creative influences without resorting to outright copying of them to be genuine rockers in the late 1980s. Sonic authenticity, paradoxically, required *both* traditionalism and originality. For most music journalists who reviewed *Baby Blue*, the beginner’s enthusiasm of the Kingston quintet translated into heartfelt and convincing recordings of tough, if not somewhat conventional, material. The Tragically Hip’s raw no frills debut EP started making waves in Canadian alternative rock music circles right away.

The first single released from *Baby Blue*, “Small Town Bringdown,” did well on the left side of the dial at Canadian college radio but gained little traction elsewhere. In a musical nod to Bob Dylan’s “Like A Rolling Stone” and “Light My Fire” by The Doors, the song opened with a solitary reverb-laden snare shot before the band blasted off. The Tragically Hip coated the tune with experience spawned from its hard-nosed touring schedule. Johnny Fay set a steady moderate pace on his Gretsch drums. Gord Sinclair’s throbbing bass lines established the harmony as it accentuated Fay’s rhythmic groove.

⁶⁰ The author observed the term “rootsy” in several articles: Glen Gore-Smith, “Tragically Hip Infuses New Excitement into Familiar Blend,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, 20 January 1988, sec. Entertainment; Mark Lepage, “Country-Rock Gem from Little-Known Dumptruck,” *The Gazette*, 28 January 1988, sec. Entertainment; Dianne Collins, “The Tragically Hip: Smalltown Triumph,” *Rock Express*, February 1988; Barr, “Club Saw: Artistic Diversity”; and Littlejohn, “The Tragically Hip: The (not So) Tragic Story.” Music journalists made comparisons between The Tragically Hip’s music and Sixties British blues-inspired rock in: Helen Metella, “Grace, Power from K,” *The Edmonton Journal*, 3 March 1988, sec. Arts & Entertainment; Tim O’Connor, “Sharps & Flats: Lovett’s Pontiac Makes Vroom at Top,” *The Chronicle Herald*, 2 April 1988, sec. Entertainment; Liam Lacey, “Local Heroes Expand Their Horizons,” *The Globe and Mail*, 1 March 1988, sec. Entertainment; Alain de Repentigny, “Les Rockers de Kingston: The Tragically Hip,” *La Presse*, 15 June 1988, sec. Arts et spectacles; and Stephen Ostick, “Royalty Rate Hike Means Higher Store Prices: Pop Beat,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, 12 August 1988, sec. Entertainment.

⁶¹ Evelyn Erskine, “Two Canadian Bands Join the Pop Fray; Strange Advance Proves Adept at Bridging Sounds While Tragically Hip Mixes the Tough, Poetic,” *The Ottawa Citizen*, 4 March 1988, sec. Now!

Meanwhile, the ringing electric guitar sounds of Rob Baker's Fender Stratocaster worked in tandem alongside the bright, jangly acoustic guitar play of Paul Langlois throughout the traditional rock track. Gordon Downie's low, throaty growls and high-pitched wails sustained the simple melody. Some carefully placed nasal back-up singing by Sinclair and Langlois rounded out the soundscape. People often misinterpreted the lyrical message of mixed affection and disappointment delivered through these vocal performances as a repudiation of small-town Canada.⁶² "It's about any local jackass who feels like a big fish in a small pond," Downie made clear. "The song has been misconstrued. It was certainly never intended as a slag against Kingston, just about a state of mind. But maybe Gord (Sinclair) should explain it because he wrote it."⁶³ Keep in mind that The Tragically Hip boasted three lyricists at the time. "I was just trying to make it rhyme," joked Sinclair. "His explanation sounds as good as any I could come up with."⁶⁴ This brief exchange highlights the ambiguity of music appreciation. Ultimately, "Small Town Bringdown" bore no fixed meaning, despite the intent or sentiment of its authors.

⁶² To view the lyrics for The Tragically Hip's "Small Town Bringdown," see Appendix 3.

⁶³ Lacey, "Local Heroes Expand Their Horizons."

⁶⁴ Lacey, "Local Heroes Expand Their Horizons."



Image 2.3: The Tragically Hip promotional photograph from 1988.⁶⁵

Many Canadians obtained their first glimpse of The Tragically Hip from the music video for “Small Town Bringdown.” The inexpensive advertisement started with a fairly grainy point-of-view shot of someone passing through a boisterous crowd in a dingy darkened pub. People had packed the Lakeshore Manor, one of Kingston’s oldest bars, where exotic dancers plied their trade by day and motorcycle enthusiasts and university students partied by night. Everyone gathered there to see the young local lads brimming with potential: The Tragically Hip. As an announcer introduced the band to the capacity audience, the video featured a series of silent cutaway shots depicting Kingston

⁶⁵ “The Tragically Hip.” RCA Canada Publicity Photograph. Canada: BMG Music Canada, 1988. Library and Archives Canada, *RPM fonds*. <http://collectionscanada.gc.ca> (accessed 14 January 2017). In this photograph, from left to right, stand Gord Sinclair, Gordon Downie, Johnny Fay, Rob Baker, and Paul Langlois.

on a dull cloudy day in the late autumn of 1987. Then, back at the raucous Manor, with a crack of the snare and a flash of light from the stage, the simulated show began. Much of the remaining screen time captured members of The Tragically Hip from all kinds of angles as they played “Small Town Bringdown” live. Director Scott Eldridge compiled this supposedly cohesive performance from an assortment of many different clips, creating the illusion of a whole concert. With rumpled shirts and worn jeans, longish shaggy hair and unkempt pale faces, the group looked decidedly gritty. The quintet’s blue-collar appearance and energetic movements combined for an effective claim to embodied authenticity. Band members certainly displayed all the preferred corporeal markers of the roots rock music discourse in Canada. The video for “Small Town Bringdown” offered several more snapshots of life in Kingston, which only seemed fitting given that small-town Canada formed the topic of the song. These unvarnished clips fostered a rather gloomy image of the lakefront borough. The Tragically Hip’s remarkably vivid performance cultivated quite the contrast.

In late January 1988, to support sales of *Baby Blue*, The Tragically Hip launched its first coast-to-coast trek of Canada. “It’s not like a full-blown national tour or anything,” Gordon Downie clarified midway through the cross-country excursion that started in Halifax, Nova Scotia and ended at Victoria, British Columbia. “It’s more like a fact-finding mission to get our name known in various centres where our album seems to be getting airplay. We’re trying to build up word of mouth and create kind of a street buzz in every city.”⁶⁶ This promotional strategy worked only to a limited degree. Canadian music press coverage of The Tragically Hip’s shows outside of southern

⁶⁶ Brad Oswald, “Snafu Leaves Band Undaunted,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, 18 March 1988, sec. Entertainment.

Ontario proved as sparse as the crowds that attended them. Nevertheless, employing the discourse of communal authenticity, critics surveyed the collective communication between band and audience at these gigs to see if the concerts represented genuine incarnations of Canadian rock music. Music journalists that caught the group live consistently praised the Kingston quintet. “You know you’ve found an act with steel-lined guts and intriguing wit the instant The Tragically Hip shows up,” Helen Metella informed her readership in Edmonton, Alberta.⁶⁷ Metella described the band as a hard driving, no-nonsense, musical rollercoaster ride. Though, with his unpredictable bodily twitches and cleverly poignant repartee, music journalists considered frontman Downie the main attraction. They depicted the lead singer as a one-of-a-kind showman that prowled the stage with unmatched abandon. Critics who saw the Kingston quintet perform all agreed that The Tragically Hip more than warranted the price of admission. Ticket holders, principally college students or alternative music supporters, concurred.⁶⁸ “We’ve been getting a good reaction from the crowds,” Downie relayed.⁶⁹ The roots rock troupe had started to forge its reputation as a righteous live act.

Nearing the end of 1988, despite some moderate success in Canada, The Tragically Hip had not become the country’s newest hit makers with the release of *Baby Blue*. Meagre sales resulted from mainly servicing Canadian college radio.⁷⁰ “Ici, la radio étudiante est en retard de dix ans comparativement aux États-Unis,” Gordon Downie

⁶⁷ Helen Metella, “The Tragically Hip Well Named,” *The Edmonton Journal*, 25 March 1988, sec. Arts & Entertainment.

⁶⁸ Patrick Davitt, “The Tragically Hip Finds Friends in Cities Where You’d Least Expect,” *The Leader-Post*, 18 March 1988, sec. Entertainment; Dan Pachet, “Streetbeat: Winnipeg,” *Rock Express*, May 1988.

⁶⁹ Littlejohn, “The Tragically Hip: The (not So) Tragic Story.”

⁷⁰ Music journalist Greg Barr reported in May 1988 that The Tragically Hip’s EP had sold just over 15,000 copies. The band still expected small sales spurts here and there as it continued to tour throughout the year. Barr, “Club Saw: Artistic Diversity.”

explained. “Mais elle ne peut que prendre de l'ampleur. Ça vaut mieux que de modifier notre musique en fonction de la radio commerciale.”⁷¹ In other words, the Kingston outfit refused to “sell out” just to make it in the sound recording industry. Downie appealed to the discourse of folkloric authenticity here by stressing The Tragically Hip’s autonomous negotiation of neoliberal industrial capitalism in Canada during the late 1980s. *Baby Blue* served its purpose. The band never meant for the glorified demo to be a mainstream chart topper. The group just wanted *Baby Blue* to create a word-of-mouth buzz around university campuses and other alternative music hotspots. And that it did.

In the fall of 1988, a *College Music Journal* CD sampler featuring The Tragically Hip’s “Small Town Bringdown” caught the attention of several American record company executives. A small bidding war between two major labels ensued, with each one bargaining to sign the Kingston quintet to a deal. “The winning company is the stateside parent of MCA Records,” critic Mitch Potter informed his readers that December, “which has given [The] Tragically Hip a utopian Christmas present – *carte-blanche* control over two guaranteed albums in the next two years, with yearly options for another seven records.”⁷² Potter presented creative autonomy as the crux of the recording contract and ascribed folkloric authenticity to the band for retaining it. Aware that producing and promoting an international quality full-length studio album would cost hundreds of thousands of dollars, The Tragically Hip, like most of its peers, believed that it needed direct access to the much larger American market in order to earn a living as

⁷¹ Translation by author: “Here, student radio is ten years behind compared to the United States. But it can only grow. It’s better than changing our music to suit commercial radio.” Repentigny, “Les Rockers de Kingston: The Tragically Hip.”

⁷² Mitch Potter, “Kingston Boys Sign with a Hip-Hip-Hurray,” *The Toronto Star*, 23 December 1988, sec. Entertainment. The author modified the quote here because, as per the wishes of The Tragically Hip, the definitive article in the band’s name should not be forgot.

Canadian roots rock recording artists.⁷³ Plus, translating commercial success in Canada to the United States appeared exceedingly difficult. Both Platinum Blonde and Blue Rodeo proved unable to do so quite recently. Signing with MCA Records out of New York City, therefore, provided The Tragically Hip with the shortest route to hundreds of millions of American consumers.

You Have To Be In The Right Mood For This

The Cowboy Junkies saga began with guitarist Michael Timmins and bassist Alan Anton. Best of friends from nursery school onward and partners in music since the late 1970s, when the well-to-do Timmins family moved from Montréal to Toronto, the pair formed their first band in 1981 – called Hunger Project and patterned after the British post-punk icons Joy Division – and moved to New York City. The twenty-two-year-olds often jammed with fellow expatriates Jim Cuddy and Greg Keelor of Fly To France while there.⁷⁴ After spending over a year in the Big Apple, Timmins and Anton followed the Muse to England, the home of all the contemporary music they listened to and admired. Their time in London, however, turned out disillusioning. They found that hundreds of British bands played the same kind of post-punk rock music as Hunger Project, and many of them simply did it better. Near the end of 1984, months before returning to Canada, Timmins and Anton set upon a new musical direction. “We grew up with rock and roll like everyone else,” Timmins reminisced. “But when you really love the music you get

⁷³ At almost ten times the size, the United States music market dwarfed Canada’s during the late 1980s. Chris Dafoe, “Bright Lights, Big Deal,” *The Globe and Mail*, 1 April 1989, sec. Entertainment.

⁷⁴ “We learned a lot of musical stuff from [Hunger Project],” Jim Cuddy said, regarding these basement jam sessions in the Alphabet Town district. Michael Barclay, Ian Andrew Dylan Jack, and Jason Schneider, *Have Not Been the Same: The CanRock Renaissance, 1985-95* (Toronto: ECW Press, 2001), 579.

into its roots – and that’s the blues.”⁷⁵ Inspired by the straightforwardness of mid-century Black recording artists such as Lightnin’ Hopkins, the close-knit White duo immersed themselves in the folk music customarily practiced by African Americans. Later, back home in Toronto, Timmins and Anton decided to put together a back-to-basics blues-rock band in November 1985. The most convenient people to recruit for the group just happened to be family. Peter Timmins, Michael’s little brother, though only a novice, volunteered to play drums. To find a vocalist and complete the ensemble, they looked no farther than Michael’s younger sister, Margo Timmins, who had never sung publicly and worked as a part-time secretary. “It was a surprise to me. I used to sing around the house but that was about it,” she recalled, and then laughed.⁷⁶

Singing constituted one of the few roles in rock music that men welcomed women to inhabit. Nevertheless, the paradigmatic rock performer always remained a young, fully able, White heterosexual man. Sociologist Mavis Bayton argued in her gender study of rock music that because women’s vocals contrasted with the learned skills and refined techniques of playing an instrument, which provided primary points of access to power, women singers did not threaten the overall male dominance of rock music, paving the way for their conditional acceptance.⁷⁷ Canadian music journalists, as a result, regarded Margo Timmins as a rare exception rather than as part of a rock tradition. In the beginning, when Timmins started jamming with two of her brothers and Alan Anton in a small garage in Toronto’s Little Italy district, she experimented with her vocals as she figured out how to sing for a blue-rock band. She quickly discovered that she preferred

⁷⁵ Patrick Davitt, “Musical Mongrel Hits Town,” *The Leader-Post*, 17 November 1988, sec. Entertainment.

⁷⁶ Greg Barr, “Cowboy Junkies: Wanted (by Critical Acclaim),” *The Ottawa Citizen*, 14 April 1989, sec. Now!

⁷⁷ Mavis Bayton, *Frock Rock: Women Performing Popular Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 5.

the timbre of her voice when she sang very quietly. Timmins then asked her mates to dampen their electric guitars and acoustic drums. They complied and a slow, spacious, bluesy sound came forth. “I realized my vocals are at their best when they’re really, really low, when I sing just above a whisper. I can get more tones, and it’s a lot prettier,” Timmins explained. “But when the boys turned down their instruments, they started discovering different tones they didn’t know were there, and they liked it.”⁷⁸ This ultra-minimalist quartet evolved unexpectedly. Feeling that songwriting would come later, the group initially filled its repertoire with extended covers of vintage blues numbers. When band members finally presented their roots rock sound at the local clubs, they needed to call themselves something. The ensemble chose Cowboy Junkies for its obnoxious and captivating qualities, its sheer ability to attract attention.⁷⁹

The blues-inspired Toronto troupe built a name for itself independently. Freelance producer and sound recording gizmo tinkerer Peter Moore spotted Cowboy Junkies at a bar in town during the spring of 1986 and asked the band if they wanted to test out a Calrec Ambisonic microphone that he just acquired. Designed for capturing orchestras, musicians could place their instruments all around the special omni-directional microphone, allowing them to establish the desired sonic mix before recording. “We were keen since we didn’t want to go into the studio and it was cheaper,” Michael Timmins elaborated. “We could record in our garage.”⁸⁰ On a hot day in late June, Cowboy Junkies did just that. The band laid down nine tracks for its debut independent album, *Whites Off Earth Now!!*, which established the roots-driven ensemble as one of the

⁷⁸ Barr, “Cowboy Junkies: Wanted (by Critical Acclaim).”

⁷⁹ Dianne Collins, “Cowboy Junkies: Addictive Music,” *Music Express*, October 1988.

⁸⁰ Helen Metella, “Relaxed Montrealers Do Their Own Thing,” *The Edmonton Journal*, 24 November 1988, sec. Arts & Entertainment.

strongest alternative rock acts in Canada. A handful of mainstream music journalists eventually took notice and unanimously praised the unconventional record in published reviews. Critic Greg Quill, for example, wrote: “The Junkies conjure up late 1960s experiments by white blues purists and compare favourably with the likes of The Doors, John Cale, and Nico when they were in first bloom.”⁸¹ Quill viewed *Whites Off Earth Now!!* as part of a burgeoning Canadian roots rock revival. The members of Cowboy Junkies artfully adapted the Black sound of the blues to meet their own musical needs, to express a sense of place and self, to constitute their Whiteness.

“Our first LP was very bluesy, but when we toured the United States – especially the south – we heard a lot of country music and just got addicted,” Margo Timmins confessed.⁸² Sure, Cowboy Junkies knew of legends such as Hank Williams and Patsy Cline, yet not until an extensive tour of Dixie land in the winter of 1986-1987 did the band expose itself to country music in a meaningful way. Crammed into their van for weeks on end and hearing nothing except old hillbilly chestnuts on the radio for long stretches of highway, the Toronto foursome soon discovered how sweet and sad traditional country music could truly be. The honesty and sparseness of the supposedly rural White folk form inspired the group to alter its sound. Michael Timmins started writing some original songs for Cowboy Junkies and he found in country music an intersection through which snippets of his own private prose could be combined together effectively. Country classics also crept into the line-up of material that the group wanted to record for its upcoming second album.

⁸¹ Greg Quill, “Indie Avalanche Spills Raw Talent,” *The Toronto Star*, 9 January 1987, sec. Entertainment.

⁸² Davitt, “Musical Mongrel Hits Town.”

On a cold, miserable Friday in late November 1987, Cowboy Junkies spent fourteen straight hours in the Church of the Holy Trinity, located in downtown Toronto, putting a dozen songs on tape for its sophomore effort, *The Trinity Session*. Margo Timmins and several instrumentalists – the band temporarily expanded to nine pieces that day, adding another electric guitarist, a harmonica player, a fiddler mandolinist, a pedal steel-dobro player, and an accordionist to the mix – strategically encircled a single Calrec Ambisonic microphone to create a recording that captured the ensemble’s roots rock unadulterated. Concerned that the spontaneous flow and sonic fidelity of its stage performances would be lost in a conventional commercial studio environment, Cowboy Junkies worked with producer Peter Moore, once again, to recreate its live sound as accurately as possible in this unusual setting. “It was a really amazing session,” Margo Timmins recalled. “The church was so inspirational. It was a totally ego-less day. Everyone played for the pure joy of playing.”⁸³ Recorded in a colonial-era wood and plaster house of worship designed for natural reverberation, without any post-production overdubs, mixing, or editing, all on a shoestring budget of just \$250, including pizza, *The Trinity Session* represented the antipode of contemporary popular music manufacturing.

Cowboy Junkies released its second album in March 1988 on Latent Records, the band’s independent label. Latent’s limited means of distribution resulted in few copies of *The Trinity Session* finding their way outside of the Golden Horseshoe, at least to start with. Cowboy Junkies loved how the album turned out and believed *The Trinity Session* deserved a wider audience than it had received. So, that summer, the group instructed its lawyer to quietly shop the extraordinary collection of tunes around to all the major

⁸³ John Mackie, “Playing the Blues, Smooth and Slow: Cowboy Junkies Leave out Everything but the Bare Essentials and Come up with a Unique Sound,” *The Vancouver Sun*, 19 November 1988, sec. Leisure.

Canadian record companies. Not one of them responded favourably. Undeterred and still interested in a deal, Cowboy Junkies then sent out feelers to leading labels in Britain and America. The Toronto foursome soon entertained offers from the foreign offices of Electra, Virgin, A&M, and BMG, among others. “We got dozens of responses,” Michael Timmins remembered. “It was amazing, really. Pretty well everyone was interested on some level.”⁸⁴ The band eventually signed with the New York branch of BMG during the fall of 1988. By the middle of November, *The Trinity Session* became available in retail outlets across Canada and the United States.

Most people outside of Toronto barely knew of Cowboy Junkies when the band entered the Canadian musical mainstream during the winter of 1988-1989. Nevertheless, the discourse of sonic authenticity categorized the recorded sounds on *The Trinity Session*. Music journalists across Canada generally agreed the unusual album encompassed some kind of roots amalgam that stretched the limits of blues, country, and folk music while paying homage to those time-honoured cultural forms. “It’s a very laidback (almost comatose), sort-of blues, sort-of country, sort-of folk, without being any of those things at all,” critic Dianne Collins determined.⁸⁵ Band members explained that the group’s eclectic style resulted naturally from idiosyncratic adaptations of various roots music they found appealing. Cowboy Junkies challenged the aural categorization of *The Trinity Session*. “I think what we’re doing is not so much a particular type of music, like blues,” Michael Timmins argued, “but trying to capture the attitude that went into the making of early blues, country, jazz, and rock music.”⁸⁶ Timmins cared more about

⁸⁴ Collins, “Cowboy Junkies: Addictive Music.”

⁸⁵ Collins, “Cowboy Junkies: Addictive Music.”

⁸⁶ James Muretich, “Junkies a Habit,” *Calgary Herald*, 10 November 1988, sec. Beat.

expressing sincere emotions in song than putting a genre label on the band's work. Cowboy Junkies followed an independent alternative music ethic when dealing with the discourse of sonic authenticity. Whether *The Trinity Session* fit into the prevailing parameters of definition for rock music in Canada did not concern the Toronto quartet much.

Music journalists that listened intently to the quiet, slow-paced, angst-ridden record felt either suspended in a beatific state of grace or entrenched in a bloody straightjacket, screaming for relief. At least, that is, according to published critiques. Most reviewers felt that the group's sophomore effort deserved lavish praise. "Without a doubt, *The Trinity Session* is a major contender for Canadian roots album of the year," critic Rod Campbell concluded in late November 1988.⁸⁷ At least a couple of music journalists, though, could not have disagreed more. Granted, Cowboy Junkies had managed to take melancholy mood music to sombre new lows. "But enough's enough," Stephen Ostick pleaded. "After the first few cuts at funeral dirge pace, even Margo's plaintive vocals and the tastefully sparse accompaniment can't overcome the sheer drudgery of it all."⁸⁸ In Ostick's estimation, *The Trinity Session* exhibited no great depth; this bunch of oppressively hushed tunes completely lacked mainstream commercial appeal. Still, regardless of how critics felt about the LP as a whole, almost every one of them pointed to Margo Timmins's voice as the key musical element on it. Music journalists routinely described her singing as "haunting" and, above all, "ethereal." Timmins radiated a refined delicacy that the Canadian music press found compelling.

⁸⁷ Rod Campbell, "Traveling Wilburys Supergroup Is Vivacious, Uninhibited," *The Edmonton Journal*, 24 November 1988, sec. Arts & Entertainment.

⁸⁸ Stephen Ostick, "Sheer Drudgery Burdens Cowboy Junkies' Offering," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 28 November 1988, sec. Entertainment.

The idea that genuine rock music artists authored original works remained central to the discourse of sonic authenticity in Canada. Given that half of the tracks on *The Trinity Session*, including the first single, comprised cover versions of memorable songs from the past, how could Cowboy Junkies possibly garner sonic authenticity? The answer lies in the fact that covers were endemic to rock. In the 1960s, when rock culture first took form, it inherited from rock 'n' roll a very specific set of ideas and approaches to playing new versions of old recordings. "Ironically, covers confer authenticity along the same lines that originals do," musicologist Gabriel Solis pointed out.⁸⁹ A cover version succeeded if it typified a recently fashioned work, imbued with a fresh sense of authorship. Legitimate rock covers did not rehash performances of familiar songs. Instead they expressed entirely new takes on strong, previously recorded pieces. A vast majority of Canadian music journalists who reviewed Cowboy Junkies thought *The Trinity Session* contained fabulously inventive readings of classics by artists such as Waylon Jennings, Patsy Cline, and the Velvet Underground. By revisiting, re-examining, and reinterpreting a cross section of musical styles, periods, and genres through versioning, Cowboy Junkies blurred the lines between imitation and originality, manifesting the intertextual cultural condition of postmodernism. Nonetheless, critics praised the Toronto quartet for its tasteful interpretations that creatively reimagined the initial material from the ground up. John Mackie, feeling mesmerized by these outstanding covers, declared without irony: "Cowboy Junkies is the most original band in Canada."⁹⁰ Mackie ascribed sonic authenticity to the minimalist troupe for deftly transforming other people's songs, making them anew. Cowboy Junkies believed this musical metamorphosis granted the band a

⁸⁹ Gabriel Solis, "I Did It My Way: Rock and the Logic of Covers," *Popular Music and Society* 33, no. 3 (July 2010): 315.

⁹⁰ John Mackie, "Recordings," *The Vancouver Sun*, 12 November 1988, sec. Leisure.

stake in authorship. “When somebody says they like ‘Sweet Jane,’ I think it’s a compliment to us, because our ‘Sweet Jane’ is as much ours as the Velvet Underground has theirs,” Margo Timmins explained. “We’re happy to share it with them, and we couldn’t be in better company.”⁹¹ With this one cover, members of Cowboy Junkies drew some measure of the legendary New York rock band’s authorial creativity and artistic reputation to themselves.

Cowboy Junkies released “Sweet Jane” as the first single from *The Trinity Session*. It represented a close rendition of an early version of the tune found on *1969: The Velvet Underground Live*.⁹² “Sweet Jane” by Cowboy Junkies revolved around a lilting catchy three-chord electric guitar riff that slowly cantered along through every hushed verse and chorus of the atmospheric track. The minimal percussion and harmonic bass line of the rhythm section deftly accentuated the simple yet elegant riff. Languorous vocals from Margo Timmins delivered pensive romantic lyrics strung upon a shimmering melancholic melody.⁹³ After the third chorus of the bittersweet ballad, “Sweet Jane” slid into a bridge section marked by tender guitar strokes and floating base phrases. “Heavenly wine and roses seem to whisper to me when you smile,” Timmins delicately crooned twice before the tail end of the bridge. At that point, the rhythm section swelled, the electric guitar play intensified, and the lead singer burst into a vigorous series of melodic non-lexical vocables for a few bars. “Sweet Jane” ended with one final reprise of

⁹¹ Barr, “Cowboy Junkies: Wanted (by Critical Acclaim).”

⁹² This early version of “Sweet Jane,” though written by Lou Reed and recorded by Velvet Underground in 1969, did not get released until 1974. However, another adaptation of “Sweet Jane” – set in the key of D-major, with a much quicker tempo, a fourth chord added to the signature electric guitar riff, almost entirely different lyrics, and the whole bridge section removed – appeared on Velvet Underground’s *Loaded* from 1970. Over the next few years, covers of the latter version by Mott and the Hoople and Brownsville Station helped turn that incarnation of “Sweet Jane” into a rock standard. Lou Reed also incorporated the piece into many of his live performances over the decades.

⁹³ To view the lyrics for “Sweet Jane” by Cowboy Junkies, see Appendix 4.

the chorus. Covering the beloved rock touchstone constituted a risky move for the unknown Toronto quartet. But critical reaction to the single proved overwhelmingly positive, especially in the United States, where it became a significant hit on modern rock radio. Perhaps the greatest compliment Cowboy Junkies received for “Sweet Jane” came from Lou Reed, who reportedly said, “C'est la meilleure et la plus authentique version que j'ai jamais entendue.”⁹⁴ Be that as it may, despite such laudable reviews, the languid cover did not fare that well on Canadian commercial radio, peaking at number seventy-five on the *RPM* 100 Singles chart in late April 1989.⁹⁵

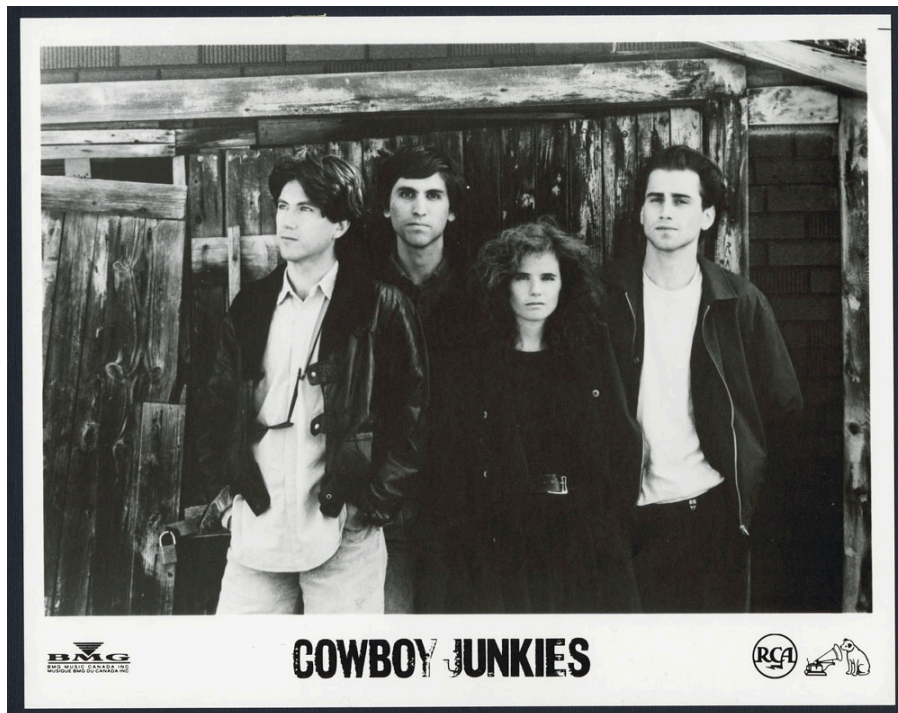


Image 2.4: Cowboy Junkies promotional photograph from 1988.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Translation by author: “It’s the best and most authentic version I’ve ever heard.” Michel Bilodeau, “Pas banale, la façon d’enregistrer de Cowboy Junkies!,” *Le Soleil*, 15 January 1989, sec. Les arts et spectacles. Five other newspaper articles published during the press cycle for *The Trinity Session* mentioned this quote from Lou Reed.

⁹⁵ “RPM - Library and Archives Canada,” accessed 10 August 2016, <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/rpm>.

⁹⁶ “Cowboy Junkies.” BMG Music Canada Publicity Photograph. Canada: BMG Music Canada, 1988. Library and Archives Canada, *RPM fonds*. <http://collectionscanada.gc.ca> (accessed 14 January 2017). In this photograph, from left to right, stand Alan Anton, Michael Timmins, Margo Timmins, and Peter Timmins.

Cowboy Junkies established its understated image most effectively in the music video for “Sweet Jane,” which garnered high rotation on MuchMusic throughout the spring of 1989. The video appeared remarkably sombre. It opened with the barely discernable, silhouetted figure of Michael Timmins, sitting hunched over his electric guitar, strumming along to the track. The camera ever so slowly panned right to reveal the shady outline of a cymbal and the right shoulder of drummer Peter Timmins before cutting to black. A quick grainy close-up shot of two dull green thorny rose stems in front of a wrinkled white drapery followed. Then, Margo Timmins appeared out of the darkness. Just her pale, angular face and plunging ivory neckline appeared visible as she lip-synched the first line of “Sweet Jane.” Aside from a few evocative shots of an interlinked chain and red roses, enduring symbols of disconnection and romance respectively, the rest of the dimly lit advertisement focused on the Toronto quartet pretending to perform in front of a textured light grey backdrop. The stillness of their shadowed bodies matched the serenity of the plaintive music. Cowboy Junkies projected an attitude toward visual identity that aligned with the prevalent roots rock ideal of prioritizing music over image, lending the band a dose of embodied authenticity. Canadian music journalists, however, barely discussed the ensemble’s low-key look during the press cycle for *The Trinity Session*, which makes sense logically since Cowboy Junkies premised its visual identity on self-effacement.

For this unsung band to record *The Trinity Session* using a single omni-directional microphone in the silence and sanctity of an empty church constituted one thing. For Cowboy Junkies to take its laid-back roots rock material on the road and actually share it with other people in various watering holes across Canada represented another thing

entirely. Placing singular emphasis on contemplative imagination rather than ostentatious spectacle, the reserved Toronto troupe simply refused to perform loud, glitzy shows. “When we play live, especially, we make it a point – and it might be a little arrogant – that the audience is going to listen to us,” Michael Timmins made clear early on. “We’re not going to turn it up just to be heard over a din.”⁹⁷ Brooking no concessions to concertgoers involved a dangerous gambit. And although band members risked alienating large segments of the crowd by seeming to perform only for themselves, Cowboy Junkies would not “spoon-feed” its music to anyone, Timmins maintained.⁹⁸ This condescending attitude reflected a traditionally bourgeoisie understanding of music appreciation that stressed quiet close listening, and summarily dismissed Canadian rock bar patrons who wished to dance and party the night away to roaring lively tunes as immature.

Cowboy Junkies performed precious few live shows across Canada during the winter and spring of 1989 in support of the national release of *The Trinity Session*. Band members nicknamed these intermittent jaunts the “shh” tours, a wry comment on how some fans always shushed talkative patrons at their gigs.⁹⁹ Rarely could conversation in a bar be heard over a band’s playing, still that often happened with Cowboy Junkies in concert at this time. Just a few talkers among the crowd could actually drown out the minimalist ensemble. The discourse of communal authenticity evaluated collective communication at these shows by focusing attention on both performers and audience members, albeit for different but related reasons and to varying degrees, to see if any

⁹⁷ Craig MacInnis, “Toronto Trio Getting a Rush out of Reality,” *The Toronto Star*, 4 March 1988, sec. Entertainment.

⁹⁸ “‘Death Country’ Describes Band’s Sound,” *The Hamilton Spectator*, 11 January 1989, sec. Entertainment.

⁹⁹ John Mackie, “Cowboy Junkies Sweetly Sway ‘Shhhhhed’ Crowd,” *The Vancouver Sun*, 2 June 1989, sec. Entertainment.

given concert by Cowboy Junkies constituted a genuine incarnation of rock music in Canada. In the beginning, most ticket holders represented followers of alternative rock; young adults that seldom came to bars yet wanted to catch the trendy Toronto troupe live. They appreciated the roots rock music on display and listened attentively. The remainder of the crowd usually contained a mixture of bemused, puzzled onlookers, a few of whom left before the show had even finished. “You have to be in the right mood for this,” a Winnipeg music journalist overheard someone in the audience say before leaving the venue prematurely. “Like if your best friend just died.”¹⁰⁰ Nevertheless, by the summer of 1989, having broken through commercially in Canada and the United States, Cowboy Junkies started filling soft seat theatres and, in the case of Toronto, a massive forum with thousands of people who all really wanted to listen carefully to each breathy syllable and every softly drawn note. The discourse of communal authenticity championed crowds that fostered collective communication like this.

“What you hear on record is what you get live,” Michael Timmins promised Montréalers in a pre-show interview.¹⁰¹ To fully replicate the sound of *The Trinity Session* in concert, Cowboy Junkies toured with three of the guest musicians that played on the innovative album: Jeff Bird, Jaro Czerwinec, and Kim Deschamps. In 1989, a typical performance began with the six instrumentalists in the ensemble sauntering out slowly and forming a semi-circle around the stage. Several of the players sat on chairs. The only light came from some very dim spots and a collection of tiny votive candles that threw an amber glow on the cabaret setting. Soon after that, Margo Timmins strode out

¹⁰⁰ Stephen Ostick, “Hiatt Downplays Technique Employed in Crafting Songs: Pop Beat,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, 2 December 1988, sec. Weekend.

¹⁰¹ John Griffin, “Toronto Band Cowboy Junkies Hooked on Natural Sound,” *The Gazette*, 12 May 1988, sec. Entertainment.

and perched herself on a bar stool that rested beside a small table holding glasses of water and some fresh flowers tucked into a crystal vase. Cowboy Junkies consistently created a low-key and intimate environment in which the band could strike up its placid blend of roots music.

Critics issued decidedly mixed responses to the group's performances in Canada. A large contingent of music journalists found Cowboy Junkies mesmerizing live. "This was nothing less than an utterly enchanting show, lovely in its languor, its unhurried belief that the best moments in music are worth straining to hear," Craig MacInnis declared in his glowing concert review.¹⁰² Even though it took some effort to realize, MacInnis experienced collective communication with the Toronto troupe. Yet, by rarely straying from the moody, evocative roots-inflected sounds of *The Trinity Session*, Cowboy Junkies hardly constituted everyone's cup of tea. Critic Mike O'Brien, for instance, felt the relaxed tone threatened to wade into the waters of boredom. "The band needed to pick up the pace a bit," he counselled, "but instead turned their lullaby into a lull, stopping too long between songs and avoiding communication with the audience."¹⁰³ Detractors accused Cowboy Junkies of mistaking a mannerism – slowing down the music to make it seem more profound – for a style. Good as the effect might be initially, it faded quickly. Some music journalists grew tired of the band's somnambulant sound and stage presence after just a couple of songs. They determined that Cowboy Junkies lacked the communal authenticity to deliver a *bona fide* performance of rock music.

¹⁰² Craig MacInnis, "Cowboy Junkies Triumph with 15,000 Fans at Forum," *The Toronto Star*, 26 July 1989, sec. Entertainment.

¹⁰³ Mike O'Brien, "Cowboy Junkies Offer Unique Mix," *The Leader-Post*, 18 November 1988, sec. Entertainment.

Though Canadian music critics debated the merits of each performance by Cowboy Junkies, they generally agreed that Margo Timmins formed the focal point of every show. Sociologist Mavis Bayton discovered in her gender study of British rock music that, with female singers, people traditionally placed emphasis on appearance, image, and visual performance, whereas analysis and discussion of vocal technique or the voice-as-instrument proved relatively absent.¹⁰⁴ Canadian music press coverage of Cowboy Junkies during the late 1980s exemplified the same tendencies that Bayton observed in the United Kingdom. “Lovely and forlorn,” music journalist Mark Lepage began his description of Margo Timmins on stage in Montréal, “her face surrounded by a mass of hair, her voice was a white satin whisper.”¹⁰⁵ The way Timmins looked mattered most to the reporter. In Vancouver, critic Bruce Mason likened the lead singer to a movie star: “Front and centre is Margo, a former social worker whose understated angst and tumbling hair would light up any of the films that play the Ridge [cinema].”¹⁰⁶ Once again, the concert reviewer focused upon her outward characteristics. These two examples encompass but a small sample of the extensive gendered treatment Timmins received at the hands of the music press in Canada. The shy subdued lead singer became uncomfortable with the increasing glare of the media spotlight. During a ten-day stretch in January 1989, Timmins conducted feature interviews with, among others, *People*, *Seventeen*, and *Spin* magazines. “This isn’t really me,” she confided weeks later. “I prefer to stay home and do needlepoint. And I keep wondering when I’m going to get time to do

¹⁰⁴ Bayton, *Frock Rock*, 13.

¹⁰⁵ Mark Lepage, “Cowboy Junkies Hypnotic,” *The Gazette*, 2 October 1988, sec. Entertainment.

¹⁰⁶ Bruce Mason, “Nothing Junky about This Band,” *The Province*, 2 June 1989, sec. Entertainment.

the wash. I like doing the wash.”¹⁰⁷ Stressing her preference for domesticity seemed to help Timmins keep grounded as the sudden swirl of fame threatened her sense of identity.

Canadian music journalists monitored how Cowboy Junkies handled commerce and technology as the ensemble created its alternative brand of roots rock music. The discourse of folkloric authenticity positioned autonomy as the ultimate criterion for negotiating neoliberal industrial capitalism in Canada during the late 1980s. For members of Cowboy Junkies, maintaining self-sufficiency while navigating the sound recording industry proved paramount. “We keep our priorities straight,” Michael Timmins said reassuringly, speaking on behalf of the band. “We don’t want to be stars. We want to make enough money to live off our music, and we want to make music that’s good enough to earn us respect.”¹⁰⁸ Timmins tended to the discourse of folkloric authenticity here. Cowboy Junkies tried to strike a balance between the economic imperatives of making sound recordings for a living and the ideals of artistic integrity governing roots rock culture. The minimalist Toronto troupe maintained its autonomy during the independent production of *The Trinity Session* in large part by having affordable access to cutting-edge digital recording technologies that captured its live sound unadulterated. Canadian critics and consumers judged for themselves whether Cowboy Junkies deserved admiration. Nevertheless, with over 100,000 copies of the ridiculously low-budget *The Trinity Session* sold in Canada, plus another half of a million and counting in the United States, by the end of 1989, the band’s financial prospects appeared golden.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ Jack Todd, “Digging for Gold; Cowboy Junkies Are a Junkpile of Contradictions,” *The Gazette*, 12 February 1989, sec. Entertainment.

¹⁰⁸ Griffin, “Toronto Band Cowboy Junkies Hooked on Natural Sound.”

¹⁰⁹ “Gold/Platinum,” *Music Canada*, accessed 12 June 2016, <http://musiccanada.com/gold-platinum>. “RIAA - Gold & Platinum Searchable Database,” accessed 12 June 2016,

Conclusion

This chapter recounted how the onset of a roots rock revival shaped the discourse about authenticity in Canada during the late 1980s. Hetero-patriarchy continued to organize perceptions of what constituted real rock music. Canadian music press coverage of Margo Timmins from Cowboy Junkies exemplified this point best. Critics consistently prioritized her visual appearance over her singing skills, denying her a position of power and reinforcing the maleness of rock. Hegemonic understandings of gender and sexuality also emerged repeatedly in the song lyrics and music video treatments of the bands under examination. Rock culture marginalized women from all social classes. The dawning of a roots rock revival altered the discourse about authenticity by explicitly highlighting the paramountcy of race to rock music. Platinum Blonde dabbled in funk to overcome its New Romantic past. The Tragically Hip emulated British blues rockers from the 1960s. Cowboy Junkies, meanwhile, experimented with traditional blues music, bending the African American folk music form to suit its artistic purposes. All three of these examples featured White musicians from Canada echoing Black performance in their search for rock authenticity during the late twentieth century. The discourse about authenticity revolved around the unarticulated supposition of Whiteness: race only became a topic of conversation when the ensembles under study mirrored African American musical styles.

This chapter also outlined how the cultural condition of postmodernism carried on during the dawning of a roots rock revival at the end of the 1980s. Foremost, music

<http://www.riaa.com/goldandplatinumdata>. Cowboy Junkies' *The Trinity Session* reached platinum sales in the United States in March 1996.

videos – whether by Blue Rodeo, Platinum Blonde, The Tragically Hip, or Cowboy Junkies – continued to conflate performance and promotion. Informed by the logic of neoliberal capitalism, the indispensable cultural medium kept deconstructing the purported opposition between art and commerce that undergirded the discourse about authenticity. At the same time, Canadian roots rock bands displayed visual identities that contrasted sharply with the flamboyant glamour of popular New Romantic outfits from yesteryear. All four groups examined in this chapter dressed casually in understated everyday wear, signalling a singular emphasis on music, not fashion. Still, despite such overtures of authenticity, these ensembles each constructed yet another image in the overdetermined visual universe of the postmodern. At the close of the 1980s, Canadian sound recording industry professionals, critics, and consumers appeared increasingly open to roots rock sounds and the idea that music should be more than a product of the high-tech Early Digital age.

Appendix 1: Complete Lyrics to Blue Rodeo's "Try"

Don't tell me I'm wrong
'Cause I've been watching every move that you make
Hearts you steal, in your make up and heels
Trouble for the man that you date

Every time you walk in the room
I couldn't ever be sure of a smile
You were never the same way twice
I'm falling in love
Oh, night after night – oh it's crazy...ooh

So many people who said, ooh
Girl you've got nothing but time
Oh you are a shining star
Don't you worry what you're leaving behind

Every time you walk in the room
I couldn't ever be sure of a smile
You were never the same way twice
I'm falling in love
Oh, night after night – oh it's crazy...

Oh you got to try, try, try.
Ah don't you know you've got to try,
Try, try. Try. Oooh
Oh baby you try, oh.

Every time you walk in the room
I couldn't ever be sure of a smile
You were never the same way twice
I'm falling in love
Oh, night after night – oh it's crazy...

Oh you got to try, try, try
Ah don't you know you've got to try
Try, try, ooh oh baby you try, oh woah woah try, oh woah woah woah

Appendix 2: Complete Lyrics to Platinum Blonde's "Contact"

Some girls with long dark dresses
Come close, but you impress me the most
And you don't need to boast
Some girls with black silk stockings
I swear, oh I got to come up for air
But they don't compare
The way you take me there

I got something on my mind
Contact! Contact!
No substitution's gonna satisfy
Contact! Contact!
Baby, come on

Sinful ain't no description
I know, your own decision will show
You've got to let it go
I just gotta know

I got something on my mind
Contact! Contact!
No substitution's gonna satisfy
Contact! Contact!
No way around it
So give me a try
Contact! A little Contact!
Baby, come on

The way you move so tight
Oh, I got to make it right
You know that I won't fight

I got something on my mind
Contact! Contact!
No substitution's gonna satisfy
Contact! Contact!
There's no way around me
So give me a try
Contact! A little Contact!
Baby, come on

Appendix 3: Complete Lyrics for The Tragically Hip's "Small Town Bringdown"

Been to Reno, drives an El Camino, can you dig that style?
Hip canteen, you always make the scene, you're a crazy child

It's a sad thing, bourbon's all around
To stop that feeling when you're living in a small town
You're long and lean but things don't get you down
You're a top ten kingpin in the borders of your hometown

Can't get hip, you work the jobs I've quit, don't you dig that style?
Won't admit, you just don't give a shit, 'cause your mind's gone wild

It's a sad thing, bourbon's all around
To stop that feeling when you're living in a small town
You're long and lean but things don't get you down
You're a top ten kingpin in the borders of your hometown

Can't live to die, too easy
Why stick around?
I want my live to please me
Not another small town hometown bringdown

This is it, you might as well get pissed, don't you dig that style?
Make your trip, there ain't that much to miss, when your mind's gone wild

It's a sad thing, bourbon's all around
To stop that feeling when you're living in a small town
You're long and lean but things don't get you down
You're a top ten kingpin in the borders of your hometown

Within the borders of your hometown
Within the borders of your hometown
Your hometown
Your hometown
Your hometown, yeah

Appendix 4: Complete Lyrics for “Sweet Jane” by Cowboy Junkies

Anyone who’s ever had a heart
Wouldn’t turn around and break it
And anyone who’s ever played a part
Wouldn’t turn around and hate it

Sweet Jane, sweet Jane
Ahh sweet, sweet Jane

You’re waiting for Jimmy down in the alley
Waiting there for him to come back home
Waiting down on the corner
And thinking of ways to get back home

Sweet Jane, sweet Jane
Ahh sweet, sweet Jane

Anyone who’s ever had a dream
Anyone who’s ever played a part
Anyone who’s ever been lonely
And anyone who’s ever split apart

Sweet Jane, sweet Jane
Ahh sweet, sweet Jane

Heavenly wine and roses seem to whisper to me when you smile
Heavenly wine and roses seem to whisper to me when you smile

La la la la, la la la, la la la, la la la
La la la la, la la la, la la la, la la la

Sweet Jane
Sweet, sweet Jane

Chapter Three: Changing of the Guard, 1988-1990

The turn of the 1980s witnessed a changing of the guard in English-Canadian rock music. Glass Tiger, which had dominated the domestic scene since 1986 with its trendy mainstream material, lost the responsibility of leading the production of rock in Canada.¹ The Newmarket quintet floundered as the group ditched its outdated New Romantic sound and look, and searched for relevance. In 1989 and 1990, alternative roots rockers Blue Rodeo, The Tragically Hip, and Cowboy Junkies released a batch of LPs that ushered in a changing of the guard. All three bands shared a commitment to sonic fidelity in the recording studio and a nonchalant attitude toward cultivating image and celebrity. Blue Rodeo led the way. Its adventurous, country-tinged tone struck a chord with critics and fans across Canada, catapulting the ensemble to the top of the sales charts. Meanwhile, The Tragically Hip's raw and rugged collection of tunes established the Kingston outfit nationally as a burgeoning blues-rock talent. Cowboy Junkies successfully followed up its breakthrough album, *The Trinity Session*, without compromising its notoriously subdued folk-rock style. By the start of the 1990s, these three roots rock acts had established a changing of the guard in English-Canadian rock music.

¹ Glass Tiger constituted the top-selling domestic sound recording artist in Canada for both 1986 and 1988. In 1987, Canadian artists Bryan Adams and Gowan out sold the Newmarket quintet in Canada.

This chapter outlines the evolution of the discourse about authenticity during this tumultuous period. Hegemonic understandings of gender and sexuality continued to routinely shape discussions of what constituted real rock music in Canada at the time. Issues of race, however, barely surfaced during this changing of the guard. Only The Tragically Hip's alabaster take on the Mississippi Delta blues garnered some consideration of race. Otherwise, Whiteness, once again, operated as an unarticulated presupposition underlying deliberations of rock legitimacy. The discourse about authenticity began to include serious contemplation of the expression of place at the turn of the 1980s. This chapter suggests that the political and economic condition of neoliberalism fostered that discursive shift. Canadians worried the Free Trade Agreement with the United States would exacerbate American cultural influence over them. Catering sound recordings to American tastes, therefore, developed into a lightning rod for criticism. Exhibiting a sense of place became another principal marker of authentic rock music in Canada.

Relevant Rock

Glass Tiger started recording its eagerly awaited second LP in November 1987, more than twenty-six months since the band last entered the studio. Times had changed and so had the quintet from Newmarket, Ontario. Back in the mid-to-late 1960s, when rock music came of age, enthusiasts widely believed that having a strong social or political message gave rock a meaningful relevance, an abiding seriousness that distinguished the emerging genre from mere money making entertainment. Although the 1970s marked the end of the countercultural youth rebellion, rock carried on and thrived, reaching

previously unthinkable commercial heights. By the early 1980s, people in Canada generally saw rock stars as apolitical jet-setting pleasure seekers, whose wealth and fame shielded them from the harsh realities of the nascent neoliberal era. Nevertheless, a new social consciousness, spawned in and through Anglo-American Ethiopian famine relief sound recording projects, started spreading across Canadian popular music circles in 1985.² Over the following couple of years, leading rock musicians took on a host of other humanitarian and political causes: from opposing South African apartheid and freeing prisoners of conscience worldwide to raising cash for farmers in the American Midwest and various environmental concerns around the globe. Canadian music press coverage of these so-called charity rock projects noted the dramatic change in attitude of the world's top rock acts and praised their generosity for donating time and energy to such noble endeavours. Glass Tiger wrote and produced its highly anticipated sophomore album amidst this intense boom in cause-related marketing.

“I think *Diamond Sun* manages to capture our spirit, and there's a real maturity there,” bassist Wayne Parker commented in July 1988, referring to the group's latest studio creation.³ That fresh grown-up tone resulted from a combination of factors. With the New Romantic movement that the band had been riding all but over and the popularity of roots rock blooming, Glass Tiger felt it needed to develop a current sound to stay relevant and expand its slightly limited fan base. Furthermore, touring around the world extensively for years in support of *The Thin Red Line* altered the Newmarket quintet's perspective, generating a newfound conviction to create rock music with a significant social or political message. Glass Tiger wrote a majority of *Diamond Sun* on

² See Chapter One of this dissertation for more on the rise of so-called charity rock in the mid-1980s.

³ Nick Krewen, “Glass Tiger Survives Sophomore Jinx with a More Mature Second Album,” *The Hamilton Spectator*, 9 July 1988, sec. Entertainment.

the road.⁴ Meteoric success had made it hard for band members to maintain connections with loved ones. The anguish of torn relationships became a recurring motif on the LP as a result.

Glass Tiger demonstrated its new mature sound on “I’m Still Searching,” the first single from *Diamond Sun*. Guitars constituted an essential component of the band’s latest bid for sonic authenticity. The fretted instruments helped the Newmarket quintet abandon its synthesizer-driven New Romantic sound. “I’m Still Searching” revolved around a memorable jangly twelve-string acoustic guitar hook. Colourful country-tinged slide guitar licks punctuated the chorus sections and a bouncy electric guitar tag rounded the track out. Glass Tiger placed emphasis on guitars to supposedly toughen up its sound and dispell any notions that the group only made tender pop music.⁵ Adult-oriented lyrics expressed a yearning for love and contentment that reflected the ensemble’s recent personal experience and completed its new mature musical outlook. Galvanized by a rapid tempo and solid harmony, the lyrics for “I’m Still Searching” outlined a paradoxical situation: wherein hurt from a shattered relationship worked in tandem with a roaming lifestyle to seemingly prevent the male protagonist from realizing the affection and fulfilment that he desired so fervently.⁶ Additionally, background vocals provided by sessional singers Sheree Jeacocke and Arnold Lanni bolstered the melody through which lead vocalist Alan Frew communicated a forlorn longing for love and contentment. Glass Tiger’s “I’m Still Searching” did exceptionally well as a single in Canada. Released in late March 1988, the track spent eighteen weeks on the *RPM* 100 Singles chart, peaking

⁴ Glass Tiger, though, composed four songs with returning-producer Jim Vallance in May 1987 at his house in Vancouver, British Columbia. Dianne Collins, “Tiger Tales,” *Rock Express*, April 1988.

⁵ Other sonic markers of rock heard in Glass Tiger’s “I’m Still Searching” included Hammond-sounding organ lines and some driving cowbell percussion (yes, more cowbell!).

⁶ To view the lyrics for Glass Tiger’s “I’m Still Searching,” see Appendix 3.1.

at number two that June.⁷ Glass Tiger scored with Canadian listeners once again. The more grown-up sound of *Diamond Sun* seemed poised for widespread acceptance among consumers.

Glass Tiger appeared determined to capture the critical respect the band thought it deserved. “Les critiques furent un peu durs à notre égard la dernière fois parce qu’ils pensaient que nous n’avions pas de profondeur, que notre musique était superficielle,” drummer Michael Hanson relayed. “Mais je crois que cet album va prouver que Glass Tiger n’est pas un feu de paille. Nous avons énormément de profondeur à offrir.”⁸ Feeling burned by music journalists who had insisted that the band only made lightweight pop, the Newmarket quintet countered these detractors by recording a serious album designed to ensure the group’s longevity. Glass Tiger staked a claim to rock authenticity with *Diamond Sun*. In particular, the tracks “This Island Earth” and “Diamond Sun” tapped into a highly influential discourse of sonic authenticity circulating in the Canadian rock culture at the time, one that prized recording artists who made music with a pertinent principled message. Glass Tiger, however, did not always sport this humanist outlook. “I don’t really see social and political songs becoming our mainstay. We’re not going to become Sun City,” Alan Frew stated confidently back in March 1986. “I look to music as I do other forms of entertainment. For example, when I go to a movie I like to bury myself there, to be able to pretend the world doesn’t exist.”⁹ Something obviously

⁷ "RPM - Library and Archives Canada," accessed 5 May 2015, <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/rpm>.

⁸ Translation by author: “The critics were a little rough on us last time because they thought we had no depth, that our music was superficial. But I think this album should prove that Glass Tiger is not a flash in the pan. We have an awful lot of depth to offer.” Unknown, “Le soleil brille pour Glass Tiger,” *Live: Le journal rock*, August 1988.

⁹ James Muretich, “Band Denies It’s out to Exploit Adams Link,” *Calgary Herald*, 27 March 1986, sec. Entertainment. In October 1985, Artists United Against Apartheid released “Sun City,” a song supportive

compelled Frew to change his mind about writing songs that addressed particularly challenging topics.

Glass Tiger felt most proud of “This Island Earth,” referencing it time and again during interviews with the Canadian music press. “It’s like the ultimate song in creativity for us,” Michael Hanson explained.¹⁰ Clocking in at six and a half minutes, the plodding pensive dirge did not suit commercial radio. The lyrics for “This Island Earth” featured an enlightened protagonist who questioned the value of materialism, raised the quandary of urban poverty, and explored the complexity of environmental destruction.¹¹ Several musicological factors shaped this brooding narrative, including but not limited to: a stomping backbeat rhythm; a simple harmonic structure; an extended electric guitar solo; some cutting vocal lines by edgy guest singer Lisa Dal Bello; plus an orchestral ending sequence reminiscent of “Strawberry Fields” by the Beatles. While not exactly a harsh indictment of industrial consumer capitalism, the closing track of *Diamond Sun* did raise the spectre of global warming in a timely fashion. In the mid-1980s, the idea that humans could provoke a swift climate catastrophe, though not widely heeded in Canada, entered the public conversation. Matters changed during the summer of 1988, though. Blistering heat waves and devastating drought sparked intense media coverage clamouring for a cause. National news outlets published speculations linking the sun-scorched wheat fields of the breadbasket to human-generated pollution, triggering passionate debate.¹² By taking on such a heavy topic, Glass Tiger revealed a more serious dimension of the band.

of the cultural boycott of South Africa and critical of United States President Ronald Reagan’s policy of “constructive engagement” with the rogue racist regime.

¹⁰ Collins, “Tiger Tales.”

¹¹ To view the lyrics for Glass Tiger’s “This Island Earth,” see Appendix 3.2.

¹² For example, a cover story in *Maclean’s* stated: “And climatologists say that extremely hot, dry weather on the Prairies could become the norm because of the so-called greenhouse effect, a global trend caused by chemical pollutants.” Patricia Chisholm, “The ‘Greenhouse’ Menace,” *Maclean’s*, 27 June 1988.

World travel had opened new horizons for members of the Newmarket outfit, fostering their growth as musicians and composers. “This Island Earth” represented just one of the tunes on *Diamond Sun* informed by a desire to say something of lasting importance.

“Diamond Sun,” the title track that opened Glass Tiger’s sophomore album, displayed another side of the group’s mature sound and recently discovered social conscience. Layers of digital drum programming designed by co-writer and producer Jim Vallance kept the rhythm pulsating. Meanwhile, several simple synthesizer lines propelled the harmony. Guest-musician Rene Worst’s masterful fretless bass performance provided a deft touch and smooth sound that helped stage the sophisticated tone of the piece. Finally, electric guitar played a very limited role in shaping the track musically; reverberating strokes first rang out during the bridge section and then only returned for the tag of “Diamond Sun.” Lyrics for this thoughtfully crafted piece told a tragic tale from the perspective of someone whose nation ached for freedom from colonial bondage, a meditative person who lamented the wayward behaviour of an unspecified oppressor.¹³ Reflecting on the inspiration for the track’s weighty political message, singer and songwriter Alan Frew revealed:

“Diamond Sun” was written when the South African problems were being blasted through the media daily. It has a very African feel to it, but then it started to grow and become more international. The lyrics began to be applicable to native Indians or Aborigines or any people affected by big conglomerates.¹⁴

Hatched in May 1987 as an ode to anti-apartheid revolutionary Nelson Mandela, “Diamond Sun” took on multiple meanings for Glass Tiger as time passed. Still, when the title track started charting as a single in July 1988, the band reiterated that “Diamond

¹³ To view the lyrics for Glass Tiger’s “Diamond Sun,” see Appendix 3.3.

¹⁴ Maureen Littlejohn, “Straight from the Tiger’s Mouth: The Recording of Diamond Sun,” *Canadian Musician*, August 1988.

Sun” spoke to the injustices faced by Indigenous peoples.¹⁵ The glossy music video for Glass Tiger’s “Diamond Sun” strongly reinforced this connection to Indigeneity. The group interspersed clips of several Indigenous-coded people, both young and old, throughout the video, rendering them central to the visualization of the contemplative song. By conspicuously relating its sound recording to the plight of North American Indigenous peoples, Glass Tiger asserted itself as a serious rock band worthy of sonic authenticity in the late 1980s.

Canadian music journalists started penning reviews of *Diamond Sun* within days of its release in April 1988.¹⁶ Glass Tiger’s more guitar-oriented tone and the group’s attempts at joining the charity rock brigade formed two recurring topics of discussion in these contradictory commentaries. Most critics welcomed Glass Tiger’s new emphasis on guitar work, consistently remarking that it made the band sound tougher and harder, almost like true rockers.¹⁷ Yet, for some music journalists, prioritizing guitar on a few tracks did not mean that Glass Tiger sounded any less of a pop ensemble than before.¹⁸ Critics debated whether the group’s sophomore record actually qualified as real rock

¹⁵ Glass Tiger linked “Diamond Sun” to the issues of Indigenous peoples on six occasions in July 1988 alone. See: Mark Lepage, “Glass Tiger Not the Wimps They Used to Be,” *The Gazette*, 8 July 1988, sec. Entertainment; Bilodeau, “Glass Tiger, un groupe qui n’a pas fini de mûrir”; Grenier, “Glass Tiger: de plus en plus international”; Doug Kelly, “Glass Tiger’s Fans Appreciate Its New Maturity,” *The Ottawa Citizen*, 22 July 1988, sec. Now!; John Mackie, “Glass Tiger’s Upward Leap Stalls,” *The Vancouver Sun*, 29 July 1988, sec. Entertainment; and Muretich, “Critics Can’t Break Glass Tiger.”

¹⁶ Compared to *The Thin Red Line*, Glass Tiger’s *Diamond Sun* garnered three times as many record reviews. The fact that Capitol Records pre-issued albums to members of the music press likely facilitated this dramatic increase in reportage.

¹⁷ Chris Dafoe, “POP: Union Toni Childs,” *The Globe and Mail*, 21 April 1988, sec. Entertainment; Glen Gore-Smith, “Glass Tiger Album Blends Romance with Awareness,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, 18 May 1988, sec. Entertainment; Keith Sharp, “Captured on Vinyl: New Releases,” *Rock Express*, June 1988; Nick Krewen, “Cool Nick’s Hot Picks: Spectator Rock Music Writer Nick Krewen Offers His Guide to the Steamy Sounds of Summer,” *The Hamilton Spectator*, 4 June 1988, sec. Weekend Now.

¹⁸ Michel Bilodeau, “‘Diamond Sun’, un deuxième microsillon attendu Glass Tiger passe l’épreuve avec succès,” *Le Soleil*, 7 May 1988, sec. Le Rock; Patrick Davitt, “Record Review,” *The Leader-Post*, 14 May 1988, sec. Entertainment; Helen Metella, “Glass Tiger’s Execution Sure to Please,” *The Edmonton Journal*, 26 May 1988, sec. Arts & Entertainment.

music in Canada. Reviews of *Diamond Sun* largely condemned the Newmarket troupe's efforts to make art with a political message. "Alan Frew and company make all the appropriate 'we've-got-a-social-conscience-and-we're-going-to-use-it' noises, and then write songs so vague or clichéd that they end up being about nothing at all," Chris Dafoe observed.¹⁹ Dafoe thought Glass Tiger's progressive posturing rang hollow. The group's rock sounded far too simplistic to warrant sonic authenticity in 1988. Not every music journalist agreed with his assessment, though. Evelyn Erskine, for instance, found the band's heartfelt expression of deeper contemplations had transformed Glass Tiger into something more than a pop commodity.²⁰ Canadian critics obviously held differing opinions about *Diamond Sun*, yet they all believed that genuine rock music encompassed material with relevant social or political messages.



Image 3.1: Glass Tiger promotional photograph from 1988.²¹

¹⁹ Dafoe, "POP: Union Toni Childs."

²⁰ Evelyn Erskine, "Fat Idea Wears Thin," *The Ottawa Citizen*, 20 May 1988, sec. Now!

²¹ "Glass Tiger." Capitol Publicity Photograph. Canada: Capitol Records, 1988. Courtesy of Capitol Records. In the photograph, from left to right, stand Wayne Parker, Al Connelly, Alan Frew, Sam Reid, and Michael Hanson.

Glass Tiger established a new visual identity to match the mature rock sound of *Diamond Sun*, chiefly through the indispensable medium of music video.²² For the hit single “I’m Still Searching,” director Don Allen helped the Newmarket quintet create a video that contained a phantasmagoria of bodies and guitars, rapidly put together and dissolved using the trendy visual effect of superimposition. Neither the band members nor the extras in the footage constituted characters in a discernible story. Rather, shifting relations between several different figures and objects simply played out on screen in particular circumstances without explanation. In doing so, the video exemplified the totally superficial world of fragmented images characterized by the cultural condition of postmodernism. With the ostentatious interior of Casa Loma – a seventy-four-year-old Gothic Revival-style mansion situated in the heart of midtown Toronto – serving as a performance space, Glass Tiger showcased its latest visual identity while pretending to play the up-tempo track in select spots located throughout the handsome heritage property. Band members wore virtually no makeup, and even though they intricately styled their hair to mirror contemporary hard rock trends, it appeared less manicured than previously. The group’s wardrobe had changed significantly as well. Black leather jackets and dark jeans comprised its latest fashion fixtures. Glass Tiger clearly tried to shed its *passé* wholesome New Romantic look. Speaking to the discourse of embodied authenticity, the band repeatedly contended during the *Diamond Sun* press cycle that its

²² In 1988, MuchMusic joined the basic television cable package offered to Canadian consumers. The music video channel now reached over three and a half million homes in Canada.

change of image happened naturally, not deliberately.²³ In other words, the musicians claimed adherence to the ideal of authenticity: they remained true to themselves. Glass Tiger insisted that experiencing the world beyond Ontario had simply constituted the troupe anew. Perhaps. Regardless, the ensemble's considerable change of style appeared rather calculated to most critics.

Glass Tiger launched its first headlining tour of Canada on 1 July 1988. Sponsored by Molson Brewery, this four-week series of concerts in support of *Diamond Sun* would find the Newmarket quintet entertaining boisterous crowds from Vancouver, British Columbia to St. John's, Newfoundland. Before the road trip started, though, Glass Tiger anxiously awaited to see what kind of audience would come to hear the band's new grown-up sound. "We don't want to get labelled as being a teeny-bopper act whose only claim to fame is that it attracts large numbers of females," Michael Hanson made clear.²⁴ The drummer attended to a far-reaching trope in the discourse of communal authenticity that assumed developed male bodies appreciated rock best. This sexist line of thought held that the corporeality of Glass Tiger's audience largely determined its collective communication. As the group's cross-country tour progressed, band members insisted that ticket holders at their shows included people other than young women. "Aujourd'hui, on note un léger changement dans la composition de notre public: un peu plus de mâles, un peu plus d'adultes," Alan Frew maintained. "Probablement parce que les textes de nos

²³ Glass Tiger made this argument in several articles: Collins, "Tiger Tales"; Krewen, "Glass Tiger Survives Sophomore Jinx with a More Mature Second Album"; Michel Bilodeau, "Glass Tiger, un groupe qui n'a pas fini de mûrir," *Le Soleil*, 10 July 1988, sec. Les arts et spectacles; Greg Barr, "Glass Tiger's Tougher Sound Catches Its Fans off-Guard," *The Ottawa Citizen*, 15 July 1988, sec. Now!; Carole Grenier, "Glass Tiger: de plus en plus international," *Le Droit*, 16 July 1988, sec. Droit au rock; James Muretich, "Critics Can't Break Glass Tiger," *Calgary Herald*, 29 July 1988, sec. Arts and Entertainment; Unknown, "Le soleil brille pour Glass Tiger," *Live: Le journal rock*, August 1988; and Evelyn Erskine, "A Tougher Tiger Bares Its Fangs," *The Ottawa Citizen*, 12 May 1989, sec. Now!

²⁴ Stephen Ostick, "The Slugs Not Hot on Success," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 30 June 1988, sec. Entertainment.

chansons sont plus substantiels.”²⁵ The singer asserted here that grown men truly valued serious music, articulating a chauvinist assumption that understood adolescent women as incapable of grasping genuine rock.

Canadian music journalists also participated in this sexist discourse routinely. Concert reviews of Glass Tiger’s summertime shows consistently mentioned the thousands of adoring young ladies that populated the crowd and described how Frew’s seductive moves on stage easily excited them. Critics appeared harder to please. “Glass Tiger did lay down some supremely catchy riffs on songs like ‘Diamond Sun’ and ‘I’m Still Searching,’” James Muretich conceded. “However, when it comes to titillating more than a lot of teenage girls, you need more than that and they just didn’t have it.”²⁶ Muretich concluded that the fellows in Glass Tiger did not qualify as real rockers because they lacked the wherewithal to rouse the few men in attendance. Still, even when a music journalist enjoyed the group’s live performance, they delivered the ascription of authenticity in sexist terms. “Glass Tiger sounded more like a rock band and less like wimpy teeny popsters,” Marc LePage declared to his readership.²⁷ Although these critics came to opposite conclusions regarding Glass Tiger’s communal authenticity, both of their arguments privileged adult male morphology, reinforcing the enduring connection between rock music and manliness in Canada.

Unbeknownst to reporters and fans alike, tension within the Newmarket troupe escalated as the summer tour advanced. Things finally hit a breaking point that fall. “I

²⁵ Translation by author: “Today, there is a slight change in the make up of our audience: a few more males, a few more adults. Probably because the lyrics of our songs are more substantial.” Alain de Repentigny, “Glass Tiger: personne ne s’entend,” *La Presse*, 6 July 1988, sec. Arts et spectacles.

²⁶ James Muretich, “Glass Tiger Fails to Corral the Fans,” *Calgary Herald*, 31 July 1988, sec. Entertainment.

²⁷ LePage, “Glass Tiger Not the Wimps They Used to Be.”

haven't been happy for several years now being just a drummer," Michael Hanson proclaimed publicly, late in October 1988. "I'm a writer and I have a deep yearning to get out there and front my own band. The time had come to make that move."²⁸ With these words Hanson formally announced his exit from Glass Tiger. Some Canadian music critics speculated that his departure could change the ensemble significantly. Considering that Hanson co-wrote half of the songs on *Diamond Sun*, including the hit single "I'm Still Searching," the troupe might sorely miss his creative input. The remaining members of Glass Tiger, nevertheless, seemed optimistic the group could weather the change. In fact, they thought Hanson should have left much sooner. "We weren't getting the quality of live drumming we wanted," Alan Frew confided months later.²⁹ Even if it relieved everyone involved, Hanson's delayed departure came at a particularly tough juncture for Glass Tiger. Sales of *Diamond Sun* had plateaued after just half a year on the market.

Business expectations ran incredibly high for Glass Tiger's sophomore effort. Weeks before the international release of *Diamond Sun*, in a congratulatory letter to producer Jim Vallance, a top executive from the band's American label wrote, "Everyone here at EMI-Manhattan believes that this album is a multiplatinum record and we are handling it just like that. No bull."³⁰ Nonetheless, despite such promise, Glass Tiger struggled to keep its commercial momentum going through the winter of 1988-1989. Double platinum sales of *Diamond Sun* in Canada had made the Newmarket outfit the

²⁸ Michael Hanson, "Glass Tiger's Drummer Quits," *The Toronto Star*, 27 October 1988, sec. Entertainment.

²⁹ Tim Arsenault, "Nightclub Notebook: Glass Tiger to Rock in New Year with Local Show," *The Chronicle Herald*, 29 December 1988, sec. Entertainment.

³⁰ Jaye Riggio to Jim Vallance, 16 February 1988. Jim Vallance Fonds, Library and Archives Canada.

chart-busting domestic act of the year.³¹ Yet, compared to the outstanding success of *The Thin Red Line*, the follow-up LP seemed like a big flop. *Diamond Sun*'s lukewarm reception in the United States proved especially disappointing for the group. Glass Tiger felt that its New York-based label failed to provide the right marketing support for the band's more grown-up sound. Whatever the case may have been, *Diamond Sun* sold much less than anticipated south of the forty-ninth parallel.³² Having spent \$275,000 making its sophomore record and close to another \$200,000 producing a couple of slick promotional music videos, the Newmarket ensemble would have been fortunate to break even on its considerable investment, given such mediocre sales.³³ Several Canadian music journalists relished Glass Tiger's inability to build upon the accomplishment of its spectacular debut. These critics thought the band had violated the discourse of folkloric authenticity by peddling "U.S. corporate rock" – sound recordings motivated by rank greed instead of noble artistic creativity – and did not deserve commercial reward or music industry accolades as a result.³⁴ They thought Glass Tiger's *Diamond Sun* abjectly catered to American mainstream rock tastes and, in doing so, expressed a foreign sense of place in its music. In the wake of such a monumental failure, Glass Tiger needed to take

³¹ Glass Tiger constituted the sole Canadian group to make the Top 30 albums of 1988 chart compiled by *The Record* trade magazine. Mark Bastien, "Canadian Recording Artists Overplayed and Undersold," *The Evening Telegram*, 7 February 1989, sec. Entertainment.

³² Glass Tiger only sold 250,000 copies of *Diamond Sun* in the United States, far fewer than the millions the band's label expected. Stephen Ostick, "Glass Tiger Aiming for Clear Hit," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 25 June 1989, sec. Entertainment.

³³ One of Glass Tiger's managers, Gary Pring, shared this information with the Canadian music press. Littlejohn, "Straight from the Tiger's Mouth: The Recording of *Diamond Sun*."

³⁴ Chris Dafoe, "The Teen Machine Cranks up the Volume: Pop," *The Globe and Mail*, 31 December 1988, sec. Entertainment; Mark Bastien, "Overexposed Canadian Singers Can't Make Music at the Cash Register," *The Ottawa Citizen*, 7 February 1989, sec. Entertainment; Craig MacInnis, "Canadian Pop's Declaration of Independents," *The Toronto Star*, 25 March 1989, sec. Entertainment; Mark Lepage, "Grapes Sweet on Home-Grown Sound; 'You Don't Want Canadian Music to Copy U.S. Corporate Rock'," *The Gazette*, 3 May 1990, sec. Entertainment.

stock of its situation and figure out how to carry on as professional recording artists in Canada. Hard work lay ahead.

Changing of the Guard

On 12 March 1989, a multitude of Canada's top-selling sound recording artists gathered at the O'Keefe Centre in Toronto for the eighteenth annual Juno Awards. It was a unique occasion for the lavish high-profile ceremony put on by the Canadian Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences. Because of a change in scheduling, almost eighteen months had passed since the show last transpired. This alteration meant that Canadian musicians who released material between the summer of 1987 and the fall of 1988 were eligible for nomination, making the nationally televised event a particularly poignant corporate referendum on the state of Canadian rock. Tumultuous times abounded for the sound recording industry in Canada. Domestic LPs did not fare nearly as well in 1988 as they had in the previous year, with only one homegrown act, Glass Tiger, squeaking on to the year-end Top 30 album chart compiled by *The Record* trade magazine. The magnitude of this unexpected sales slump alarmed business insiders.³⁵ Furthermore, in January 1989, after years of tense negotiation and a highly contentious federal election campaign dominated by the issue, the Canadian government turned to free trade with the United States for the first time since the 1860s, dismantling the long held National Policy. From the outset, when deliberations for a Free Trade Agreement opened in December of 1985, Prime Minister Brian Mulroney assured Canadians, "Our cultural identity is not on the

³⁵ Bob Spence, "Slow Year for Canadian Music," *The Evening Telegram*, 3 February 1989, sec. Entertainment.

table. It's not at risk in these discussions."³⁶ Still, unconvinced by this promise and similar ones that followed, wariness of the bilateral trade deal continued to spread throughout the populace, especially among members of the cultural establishment. Neoliberal globalization appeared imminent, and while many Canadians embraced the prospect of greater integration with the gargantuan American marketplace, most others feared it would come at a loss of national independence and cultural sovereignty.³⁷ Honouring the outstanding achievements of Canada's sound recording artists seemed more pertinent than ever.

The 1989 Juno Awards represented the first sign of a changing of the guard in English-Canadian rock music. In particular, Glass Tiger, the darlings of the commercial mainstream since 1986, lost two key categories to alternative roots rockers Blue Rodeo. Critics made the most of this turn of events. "If recent developments suggest anything, it's that shallow corporate rock is losing out to music that isn't afraid to be different," veteran music journalist Craig MacInnis concluded in his assessment of the glitzy music awards show. "I suppose that's the ultimate irony. Those who slavishly cater to American tastes have been overtaken by nonchalant Canadians with real talent."³⁸ The patriotic tone of his critique is rather striking. MacInnis explicitly connected authentic rock music to a specific form of Canadian national identity that he determined the thoughtful, courageous, and easygoing fellows in Blue Rodeo best exemplified. When the up-and-

³⁶ Christopher Waddell, "US Wants Discussion on Trade Wide Open," *The Globe and Mail*, 19 December 1985, sec. News.

³⁷ Albeit four months after the Juno Awards, a July 1989 Gallup poll found that sixty per cent of Canadians believed that the United States influenced their way of life too much – a higher percentage than at any time since 1956, when Gallup first asked the question. The poll registered the greatest level of disquiet in the province of Québec, coming in a seventy-six percent. "60% Believe U.S. Influence Too Strong: Poll," *The Toronto Star*, 7 August 1989, sec. News.

³⁸ Craig MacInnis, "Canadians Pop Potential," *The Toronto Star*, 15 March 1989, sec. Entertainment.

coming Toronto quintet joined rock legends from The Band onstage for a stirring rendition of “The Weight” to close out the Juno Awards broadcast, several music critics stressed the symbolic significance of the moment. Kerry Doole, for instance, noted:

The weighty torch was being handed on to the first Canadian band worthy of the task of picking up where The Band left off in the mid-1970s. In Blue Rodeo we have found a group similarly able to mine the rich motherlode of American roots music – folk, country, blues, jazz, rock ‘n’ roll – and come up with a sound that is both contemporary and classic.³⁹

Genuine rock in Canada rested on the timeless remodeling and repurposing of popular culture from the United States, according to Doole and his literary ilk. Blue Rodeo tended to agree with this sentiment. “It’d be pretty phony of me to write a song about Canada just because I’m a Canadian,” Greg Keelor admitted, defending his Land of Liberty lyrical content. “Everybody in the world is fascinated by the American Dream and the decline of the American Empire. From Neil Young to The Band, it has been a great Canadian tradition to be aware of the cultural monster to the south.”⁴⁰ Blue Rodeo’s penchant for Yankee characters and locales betrayed a detached fascination with the United States that coloured the group’s understanding of its own national identity during the late 1980s. Oddly enough, the Juno Award-winning Toronto troupe expressed its sense of Canadian-ness in and through American roots music.

Postcards From The Edge

Blue Rodeo found the unexpected mainstream success of *Outskirts* somewhat embarrassing. Jim Cuddy and Greg Keelor liked to see themselves as outsider artists living at the margins of Canadian society. “I’ve always associated with the subculture and

³⁹ Kerry Doole, “Carrying the Torch,” *Music Express*, May 1989.

⁴⁰ Doole, “Carrying the Torch.”

always will,” Keelor stated matter-of-factly in March 1989. “I would rather sit in a dingy bar complaining about the world than be part of the world.”⁴¹ The pair of alternative songwriters thought they must have made a pretty lousy debut album if so many people ended up buying it. Unimpressed by the widespread commercial acceptance of *Outskirts*, Cuddy and Keelor continued to poeticize their own lives in song. These postcards from the edge related tales of petty corruption, romantic betrayal, and the grudging compromises of everyday life. Cuddy crafted tunes that offered easy, hopeful flights of fancy, which yielded temporary relief from existential angst. For Keelor, however, escape seemed illusory. His pieces displayed a hard-bitten scepticism and focused on defiant individuals hitting an unequalled low. When it came time to record this new material, Blue Rodeo resisted industry conventions once again. Instead of travelling to a storied American studio, working with an illustrious producer, and making slick, glossy, format-bound rock music, the atypical quintet established a makeshift studio inside an old gutted cinema in Toronto’s east end, co-produced every track alongside a promising sound engineer, and created a lengthy, unvarnished album featuring several musical veins.

Blue Rodeo spent three rigorous weeks at Donlands Theatre in December 1988 recording its sophomore LP, *Diamond Mine*. The band transformed the dimly lit empty movie house into a temporary studio by setting up a chaotic arrangement of tacky frayed living room furniture, instruments, stage gear, and a special mobile sound recording system. Blue Rodeo hired Malcolm Burn, a talented local musician and gifted engineer with strong opinions regarding conventional production methods, to help realize the ambitious undertaking. “Malcolm’s attitude coming into this project was key,” Jim

⁴¹ James Muretich, “Blue Rodeo; Rock with a Passion,” *Calgary Herald*, 16 March 1989, sec. Entertainment.

Cuddy explained. “He has a particular hostility towards the sound of hit records, and the band felt the same way; that a hit record approach would not serve Blue Rodeo well.”⁴² Consequently, Burn taped the group live off the floor as an ensemble, creating a tight performance-oriented tone that aimed to draw the listener right into the fabric of the music. At first glance, it appears Blue Rodeo imitated the recording technique that Cowboy Junkies employed so effectively on *The Trinity Session*, yet the inspiration actually came from someone else, superstar producer Daniel Lanois. “You can feel Daniel’s presence, but he wasn’t there,” Greg Keelor indicated, a tad enigmatically. “His involvement dates back to when I once drove him from Hamilton to Toronto to catch a train. He described the process of recording, and it just made so much sense to us.”⁴³ Heeding the advice of Lanois, Blue Rodeo adopted an organic, less-is-more approach in a provisional studio setting to cut *Diamond Mine*. Plus, Burn had worked extensively as chief engineer for Lanois and brought his considerable experience with the famed producer to bear on the album too.

The critical reaction to *Diamond Mine* brimmed with compliments. Canadian music journalists largely agreed that Blue Rodeo had skilfully avoided the dreaded sophomore jinx. Critics participated in the discourse of sonic authenticity as they tried to categorize the band’s new collection of songs. Although flickers of country music remained, it appeared obvious to many a scribe that the Toronto group had refined its roots-conscious rock to have less twang. The ascription of sonic authenticity ultimately depended on the concept of originality. Music journalist Chris Dafoe praised Blue Rodeo for melding jazz, pop, and country elements together with rock to forge “a strong,

⁴² Ted Burley, “‘Diamond Mine’ LP: More Sparkle for Blue Rodeo,” *The Record*, 3 April 1989.

⁴³ Doole, “Carrying the Torch.”

cohesive and distinctive sound.”⁴⁴ On the other hand, Craig MacInnis, one of Dafoe’s peers, disagreed wholeheartedly. He thought the band really struggled to find its “essential voice” on *Diamond Mine*.⁴⁵ MacInnis thought Blue Rodeo still needed to discover its true form to fully garner sonic authenticity. Overall, the Canadian music press embraced *Diamond Mine*, though not without some reservation.

Greg Keelor persuaded his own band to release the fairly laid-back title track of its sophomore LP as the first single. “We just wanted to go with what we felt was strongest,” Keelor confided. “The funny thing is that it started off with me convincing Jim (Cuddy). Then we both worked on the manager and, after that, we all talked the record company into it.”⁴⁶ The bittersweet love song proved a wise choice. Blue Rodeo’s “Diamond Mine” flooded the Canadian airwaves during the spring of 1989, cresting at number seven on the *RPM* 100 Singles chart that May.⁴⁷ The rhythm section and keyboardist really drove this mid-tempo track: a walking bass line worked in tandem with a cymbal-tinged pumping drumbeat and shimmering organ phrases. Jim Cuddy’s cutting Fender Telecaster electric guitar play emerged sparingly yet energetically. The band pared down its sound, allowing notes to linger in space. Nonetheless, the entire troupe came together for the dynamic chorus, bridge, and coda sections of “Diamond Mine.” Keelor handled the lead vocals on the astringent ballad; meanwhile Cuddy provided some timely backup singing that bolstered the melody at pivotal moments. The song’s lyrics revolved around a central metaphor – “our love shines like a diamond mine” – which

⁴⁴ Chris Dafoe, “Blue Rodeo Cuts a Gem of Musical Contrasts,” *The Globe and Mail*, 21 March 1989, sec. Entertainment.

⁴⁵ Craig MacInnis, “Blue Rodeo Disc Mines Many Musical Veins,” *The Toronto Star*, 21 March 1989, sec. Entertainment.

⁴⁶ Stephen Ostick, “Blue Rodeo Keeps Feet on Ground,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, 12 April 1989, sec. Entertainment.

⁴⁷ “RPM - Library and Archives Canada,” accessed 6 May 2016, <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/rpm>.

acknowledged the dark side of romance as much as its glittering rewards.⁴⁸ For the eternally optimistic male heterosexual protagonist at the heart of the story, love required a little digging before one could break underneath to its hard-edged brilliance. The man, therefore, endured a particular woman's salacious indiscretions and personal ridicule because of his lasting affection for her. Not even a rampant rumour mill could dissuade this unyielding sentimentalist.



Image 3.2: Blue Rodeo promotional photograph from 1989.⁴⁹

Blue Rodeo maintained its visual identity chiefly through the music video for “Diamond Mine.” In early 1989, under the guidance of award-winning director Michael

⁴⁸ To view the lyrics for Blue Rodeo’s “Diamond Mine,” see Appendix 3.4.

⁴⁹ “Blue Rodeo.” Warner Music Canada Publicity Photograph. Canada: Warner Music Canada, 1989. Library and Archives Canada, *RPM fonds*. <http://collectionscanada.gc.ca> (accessed 14 January 2017).

Buckley once more, the band created a cinematic performance video that advertised its serious rock musicianship. Though shot in colour, a post-production mistake at the processing plant damaged the film irreparably, rendering it black and white.⁵⁰ As a result, the video for Blue Rodeo's "Diamond Mine" unintentionally mirrored crucial aspects of *film noir*, with its interest in shadowy frames and darkened lives.⁵¹ The video began with a mid shot of Greg Keelor wearing a faint denim jacket and sunglasses, an electric guitar slung over his shoulder. Keelor gripped his pale hands around a microphone resting on its stand as he prepared to lip sync the opening *acapella* line of "Diamond Mine." Lighting took on a heightened significance here because of the nature of black and white motion pictures. For, in addition to creating a gloomy atmosphere, the minimal illumination of Blue Rodeo's colourless extended commercial turned visibility into a marker of aesthetic worth and musical importance.⁵² A lone bright spotlight shone from above exclusively on Keelor, which made sense given his central role as lead singer and principal songwriter. The rest of the group had spread its stage gear out in a huge, dim performance space, forming a roomy semicircle around the bushy blond vocalist. Each instrumentalist's screen time waxed and waned in accordance with the prevalence of their contributions to "Diamond Mine." The bare bones, black and white music video brought the song's bittersweet lyrics to the foreground. The failed masculinity and delusional desire of the anti-hero at the centre of the narrative recalled the destabilization of traditional gender

⁵⁰ Christopher Ward, *Is This Live?: Inside the Wild Early Years of MuchMusic* (Toronto: Random House Canada, 2016), 210.

⁵¹ Although French critics first dubbed the equivocal American movie genre *film noir* in 1946, "black film" only became revered as a distinct genre by American and Canadian cultural critics and influential film school graduates in the 1970s. William Luhr, *Film Noir* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 44.

⁵² English academic Richard Dyer suggested links between lighting on screen for *film noir* and White racial connotations of aesthetic and moral superiority. See: Richard Dyer, "The Color of Virtue: Lillian Gish, Whiteness, and Femininity," in *Women and Film: A Sight and Sound Reader*, ed. Pam Cook and Philip Dodd (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 1-9.

securities often found in *film noir*.⁵³ As with many leading men from the postwar movie genre, the protagonist in “Diamond Mine” harboured deep ambivalence toward an irresistible *femme fatale* character, a powerful woman who seduced, exploited, and destroyed her heterosexual lovers. He repeatedly succumbed to the darkness associated with her feminine wiles. Ultimately, by exhibiting an understated look and focusing attention on its roots rock music, Blue Rodeo strongly bid for embodied authenticity in the video for “Diamond Mine.” This collection of passionately skilled, fully able, White, straight adult men positioned itself as genuinely representative of rock music in Canada.

The members of Blue Rodeo recognized they would have to lead disruptive lives of relentless touring and travelling to secure success as a Canadian rock band. Understanding that the ensemble had to seize the amazing opportunities opening up for it, and knowing this would require being away from Toronto repeatedly for extended periods of time, drummer Cleave Anderson quit the group in April 1989 to be with his young family, year-round. Mark French, a veteran of the Toronto music scene who had previously filled in for Anderson on a temporary basis, replaced him. Soon thereafter, Blue Rodeo launched a conventional coast-to-coast tour of Canada to support the release of *Diamond Mine*. The promotional trek lasted eight weeks and reached every major city centre from Halifax, Nova Scotia to Victoria, British Columbia. To meet the increasing demand for tickets, Blue Rodeo played in music halls and soft seat theatres rather than bars, where possible. Still, despite shifting to larger venues, the band attempted to keep its performances friendly. “We realized we could either go huge or make our shows more intimate, kind of like what Lyle Lovett did last year when he toured with his acoustic

⁵³ Luhr, *Film Noir*, 28.

group,” Greg Keelor explained. “And that’s what we’re doing, trying to keep the music on a real human level. We even do a skiffle set in the middle of our show now.”⁵⁴ Blue Rodeo adjusted its collective communication on the Canadian tour, making it more relatable, and ensuring communal authenticity.

Music journalists unanimously praised Blue Rodeo’s concerts during the spring of 1989. “You’ll live to regret missing this show,” critic Gary Engler predicted, admonishing Vancouverites who neglected to see the Queen Street quintet perform.⁵⁵ Reporters assessed and judged Blue Rodeo’s gigs through the discourse of communal authenticity. The appearance and demeanour of both the band and audience determined whether or not scribes considered these shows to be genuine incarnations of rock music in Canada. Each night on the road that spring, homespun soft lamplight cast a parlour glow across a sparsely attired stage and the casually dressed quintet. Frontmen Jim Cuddy and Greg Keelor attracted the lion’s share of attention. Critics marvelled at how well Cuddy’s tender, silky tenor harmonized with Keelor’s raspy, nasal twang. The pair worked every song hard, putting tremendous energy and emotion into their singing and guitar playing. Music journalist Don Curren thought either one had enough talent to anchor the group alone; Blue Rodeo possessed an embarrassment of riches.⁵⁶ And then consider keyboardist extraordinaire Bobby Wiseman, another frontman of sorts, whose unorthodox style made for quite the spectacle. Though initially irritating to some critics, Wiseman’s antics had become an indispensable part of a Blue Rodeo performance. The

⁵⁴ James Muretich, “Blue Rodeo Aims for Ageless Sound,” *Calgary Herald*, 4 May 1989, sec. Entertainment.

⁵⁵ Gary Engler, “Blue Rodeo Lives up to High Expectations: Full House at Commodore Hears Some Challenging Entertainment,” *The Vancouver Sun*, 6 May 1989, sec. Leisure.

⁵⁶ Don Curren, “Blue Rodeo Shows off Fine Country Rock,” *The Leader-Post*, 18 May 1989, sec. Entertainment.

Toronto outfit played to the converted on its Canadian tour. Several hundred fans, the majority of them grown men, attended each show, seemingly familiar with *Diamond Mine* as much as *Outskirts*. Music journalists described how ticket holders sang along to almost every tune; danced in the aisles and in front of the stage; erupted in spontaneous ovations; and, perhaps most tellingly, asked for and received encores. Audience captivation constituted a leading measure of Blue Rodeo's communal authenticity. "1989 may well be the year of the Rodeo," critic Mark LePage suggested, after catching the band live in Montréal, "and a fitting testimony it will be to the power of unaffected rocking."⁵⁷

As it turned out, 1989 indeed represented "the year of the Rodeo," at least in Canada. *Diamond Mine* became the top-selling album in the country by a Canadian artist that year, reaching double platinum sales after only a few weeks at retail.⁵⁸ Blue Rodeo achieved commercial success on its own terms. Jim Cuddy and Greg Keelor displayed business savvy in a number of ways: keeping sound recording costs to a minimum, retaining possession of their lucrative publishing rights, limiting how much money Warner Music Canada could spend promoting the band, and never asking for financial tour support.⁵⁹ For the founders of Blue Rodeo, autonomy ensured the maintenance of artistic integrity, especially while navigating the increasingly neoliberal marketplace of the late 1980s. "There's a certain spirit of rock 'n' roll that seems to have been lost completely," Keelor observed. "A spirit of independence, of adolescence, giving the

⁵⁷ Mark LePage, "Blue Rodeo Ropes Fans with Show of Their Lives," *The Gazette*, 14 May 1989, sec. Entertainment.

⁵⁸ "Gold/Platinum," *Music Canada*, accessed 16 June 2016, <http://musiccanada.com/gold-platinum>.

⁵⁹ Doole, "Carrying the Torch."

finger. The embrace of the corporate still seems so contradictory.”⁶⁰ Keelor articulated the discourse of folkloric authenticity here and placed Blue Rodeo squarely within its rubric. He prized self-sufficiency and vowed to never let his alternative roots rock group sell out like several of its peers had done recently. In fact, the confluence of rock and advertising reached a marked intensity by the late 1980s, as many leading acts routinely negotiated lucrative tour sponsorship deals.⁶¹ Still, even though *Diamond Mine* topped the Canadian charts in 1989, it did not fare nearly as well elsewhere. The strictly formatted American commercial radio system proved allergic to Blue Rodeo’s musical eclecticism. Equally problematic for the band, months of hellish club gigs across the United States failed to generate a groundswell of support there. The Toronto quintet tried its hardest to crack the massive American market but left disappointed and wanting.

Delta Bound

Executives at MCA Records in New York City suggested The Tragically Hip create its first full-length studio LP under the auspices of veteran American rock producer Don Smith, a guitar-band specialist who had recently made albums with luminaries such as Keith Richards, the Travelling Wilburys, and Tom Petty. The Kingston quintet met Smith in late 1988 and knew right away that he suited the job perfectly. “We were really conscious of trying to capture the sound of the band live,” bassist Gord Sinclair explained. “That’s why we decided to work with Don Smith because his credentials were

⁶⁰ Doole, "Carrying the Torch."

⁶¹ Timothy Dean Taylor, *The Sounds of Capitalism: Advertising, Music, and the Conquest of Culture* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), 195.

basically with all the guitar bands we had listened to for the last ten years.”⁶² Given his laudable track record, The Tragically Hip had confidence that the seasoned producer could get its earthy, blues-tinged twin-guitar feel on tape. In terms of choosing a place to do all this, the group took Smith’s advice to pick somewhere far away from Lake Ontario and headed to historic Memphis, Tennessee: the self-styled home of the blues and birthplace of rock ‘n’ roll. During January and February of 1989, the Kingston outfit spent six rewarding weeks down there in Ardent Studios cutting tracks for its major label debut.

Don Smith worked tirelessly as he meticulously sculpted the tone The Tragically Hip wanted on record. “Don’s real big on getting the sounds first, so we spent the first week in the studio just getting the sounds,” rhythm guitarist Paul Langlois revealed.⁶³ The band brought twenty road-tested tunes to the Memphis sessions, registered sixteen, mixed fourteen, and ultimately chose eleven solid ones for the finished product, *Up To Here*. Things ran smoothly in Ardent Studios as Smith and engineer Bruce Barris recorded The Tragically Hip mostly as a live ensemble, with hardly any overdubs. If a particular take seemed weak, then the entire group did it over again instead of digitally patching individual corrections after-the-fact. “C’est une méthode de travail très sixties et d’après moi c’est la meilleure pour conserver tous sa spontanéité à la musique,” Gord Sinclair maintained.⁶⁴ The Kingston quintet pulled all-nighters for weeks on end, making sure it got the austere, blues-inflected sound it desired. *Up To Here* derived much of its

⁶² Tim Arsenaault, “Garage Rock Sound Keeps ‘Hip’ Happy,” *The Chronicle Herald*, 9 November 1989, sec. Entertainment.

⁶³ Nick Krewen, “Less Is More with Tragically Hip,” *The Hamilton Spectator*, 26 September 1989, sec. Life/Entertainment.

⁶⁴ Translation by author: “It is a very sixties working method and in my opinion it is the best for keeping all the spontaneity of the music.” Michel Bilodeau, “The Tragically Hip: un rock discret inspiré des années 60,” *Le Soleil*, 8 April 1990, sec. Les arts et spectacles.

soulful edge from lead singer Gordon Downie's quavering, uneasy vocals, which delivered darkly poetic lyrical content. He filled the album with portraits of men that encompassed outsiders, victims and misfits, as well as those in desperate, unhinged relationships. All of which suggested disconnectedness and an urge for escape. "I write what I write," Downie shared, speaking of his lyrics. "I've never really thought well, I'm from a sort of middle class, white-bread conservative upbringing, so I should write songs that are congruous with people's image of what that looks like. You go places and you see things, and you meet people and you remember things."⁶⁵ While acknowledging his particular White roots stemmed from Kingston, a squeaky-clean cradle of the Canadian establishment, Downie asserted that his brooding, rebellious lyrics comprised genuine self-expression. He claimed authenticity.

Up To Here hit Canadian record store shelves in late August 1989. The critical reception proved rather mixed. Some music journalists raved about The Tragically Hip's distinctive sound. Tom Harrison, for instance, wrote: "The Kingston band is one of many who've sprung from local scenes to become the next breed of musicians whose sense of place and whose assimilation of rock and folk roots is writing a new chapter in Canadian music."⁶⁶ In addition to ascribing sonic authenticity to The Tragically Hip, Harrison framed *Up To Here* as part of a changing of the guard in Canadian rock music, one led by fellow roots rock revivalists Blue Rodeo and Cowboy Junkies. Two other critics also applauded The Tragically Hip's ability to seamlessly mesh conventional electric guitar

⁶⁵ Alison Mayes, "Lousy Food, Lousy van - That's Success," *Calgary Herald*, 8 March 1990, sec. Entertainment.

⁶⁶ Tom Harrison, "Shooting from the Hip," *The Province*, 19 October 1989, sec. Entertainment.

fare with elements of the Delta blues.⁶⁷ A number of music journalists, however, lamented the Americanization of the band's tone on *Up To Here*. Helen Metella felt that *Baby Blue* contained a brand of "uniquely Canadian" rock music that she woefully missed in The Tragically Hip's latest collection of tunes. "It'll probably sell millions and make the commercially minded Americans proud," she predicted. "But the only part of the band that retains its original invention is the name."⁶⁸ Metella, and reporters of her ilk, inextricably related sonic authenticity to national identity: a Canadian group with an American sound seemed overly imitative and thus, by definition, inauthentic. The Kingston quintet generally took such criticism in stride. "I suppose we are derivative, but tell me what isn't," Gordon Downie countered. "If you're into rhythm 'n' blues-influenced music, like us, you're just trying to bring a new perspective to it on the basis of being young and new."⁶⁹ Downie's justification of The Tragically Hip's artistic material focused on the band's youthfulness and novice status, eliding the issue of nationalism altogether. It also raised the topic of race, if only euphemistically.

The Kingston quintet recorded its first full-length LP in the birthplace of the blues: the Mississippi Delta. By incorporating elements of that African American art form into its musical material, the band followed a well-established rock tradition dating back to the 1960s in Britain. Canadian music journalists noticed. "The Tragically Hip sound like their soul was carved out of the same Delta sweat that inspired The Rolling

⁶⁷ Evelyn Erskine, "Hip Hones Its Rough, Back-Room Rock 'N' Roll," *The Ottawa Citizen*, 1 September 1989, sec. Now!; Claude Beaugard, "Redécouvrir Félix et retrouver Elton John...," *Le Droit*, 9 September 1989, sec. Arts et spectacles.

⁶⁸ Helen Metella, "Rock," *The Edmonton Journal*, 27 August 1989, sec. Entertainment.

⁶⁹ Mitch Potter, "Kingston Guys Take a Ticket to Ride," *The Toronto Star*, 30 March 1990, sec. Entertainment.

Stones and The Yardbirds,” Rick Clark suggested.⁷⁰ These five White men from Kingston emulated these legendary British outfits and tried on the blues for size. Though most did, not every critic thought that The Tragically Hip made the conceit work.⁷¹ Chris Dafoe, for example, found fault in the lead singer’s inconsistent vocals: “[Gordon] Downie has one of the weirdest voices in music, an eerie drawl that can sound terribly affected one minute (think Bryan Ferry sings Robert Johnson) and perfectly natural the next.”⁷² Downie’s occasional attempts at imitating a Black Delta bluesman on *Up To Here* struck Dafoe as lacking sonic authenticity. His mimetic mannerisms also illustrated the extent to which the mirroring of Black performance remained a constituent component of White identity in Canada at the close of the 1980s.

“Blow At High Dough,” the first single from *Up To Here*, featured heady clusters of wordplay that seemed somewhat nonsensical, especially when taken outside of their musical context.⁷³ This mass of musings revolved around a central refrain based on a line plucked straight from Gordon Downie’s childhood: “On the last days of summer vacation, mom would always say, ‘You’re going at high dough, but in three days it’s over.’”⁷⁴ The Tragically Hip’s lead singer struggled to corral his thoughts concerning the lyrics into a pat explanation. “It’s fractured at best, it doesn’t make sense without the song, but I don’t believe it has to,” Downie pointed out. “Everybody seems to ask about that one, so it must be working appropriately.”⁷⁵ The Tragically Hip’s “Blow At High

⁷⁰ Rick Clark, “U.S. Regional Report: Memphis,” *Music Express*, May 1989.

⁷¹ Alison Mayes, “Hip Tip Hats to Home,” *Calgary Herald*, 13 October 1989, sec. Entertainment.

⁷² Chris Dafoe, “Swampy Obsessions of the Tragically Hip,” *The Toronto Star*, 1 April 1990, sec. Entertainment.

⁷³ To view the lyrics for The Tragically Hip’s “Blow at High Dough,” see Appendix 3.5.

⁷⁴ Potter, “Kingston Guys Take a Ticket to Ride.”

⁷⁵ Potter, “Kingston Guys Take a Ticket to Ride.”

Dough” began gently, slowly building up during the first verse before hitting full steam: with drums pumping a no-frills rock backbeat, a bass grooving in the pocket, plus both rhythm and slide electric guitars blazing. Aside from a short break section on the heels of the second chorus, the instrumentation stormed on energetically throughout the rest of the uptempo four-and-a-half-minute track. “Blow At High Dough” did moderately well on mainstream Canadian radio, peaking at number forty-eight on the *RPM* 100 Singles chart in mid October 1989.⁷⁶



Image 3.3: The Tragically Hip promotional photograph from 1989.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ “RPM - Library and Archives Canada,” accessed 6 May 2016, <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/rpm>.

⁷⁷ “The Tragically Hip.” MCA Records Canada Publicity Photograph. Canada: MCA Records Canada, 1989. Library and Archives Canada, *RPM fonds*. <http://collectionscanada.gc.ca> (accessed 14 January 2017). In this photograph, from left to right, stand Gordon Downie, Gord Sinclair, Rob Baker, Johnny Fay, and Paul Langlois.

The music video for The Tragically Hip's "Blow At High Dough" started with a countdown sequence from an old black and white Universal Studios film reel. Through the extensive use of chroma key composition, the video featured band members pretending to perform live on a sound stage, while an ever-changing stream of diverse clips unfurled behind them. The Tragically Hip disdained carefully groomed images.⁷⁸ Still, considering the group's attire and choice of background material in the video, the Kingston quintet clearly curated its visual identity. All the band members dressed casually, to varying degrees. With long shaggy hair and relatively relaxed outfits, the fellows advertised themselves as easy-going yet diligent roots rock musicians – models of embodied authenticity in 1989. The Tragically Hip shared screen time with a potpourri of footage from the postwar period in United States history. Almost a third of these vintage backdrop shots featured young pale-skinned women, wearing white bathing suits or skimpy athletic gear while participating in coordinated calisthenics, synchronized swimming, as well as beauty pageant contests. The extended commercial presented motion pictures of voluptuous women for erotic impact, exhibiting the power imbalance of the heterosexual male gaze. Other memorable moments included: a glimpse of the New York City Victory Parade from 1946; snippets from the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom; a clip of the 1964 New York World's Fair nightly fountain and fireworks show; and a series of shots from the Gemini-4 manned space flight. By saturating the video for "Blow At High Dough" with nostalgic Americana, The Tragically Hip designed it to service the interests of the United States sound recording market.

⁷⁸ Harrison, "Shooting from the Hip."

Several Canadian music journalists dwelled on the Kingston quintet's ties to co-manager Allan Gregg, a wealthy Torontonion strongly affiliated with the Progressive Conservative Party of Canada. They thought that the band's cozy relationship to one of the country's most important political pollsters violated the standards of folkloric authenticity. Some rock purists suggested The Tragically Hip lacked autonomy because the group appeared to be using its contacts in the federal government to boost sales of *Up To Here*.⁷⁹ This line of criticism mystified the Kingston quintet. "We don't feel Gregg's political connection is relevant at all," Paul Langlois said, a little miffed. "It hasn't affected us and it won't. He doesn't come to a meeting or a gig thinking Tories. He's thinking tunes."⁸⁰ Being associated with the ruling Conservative Party became a bit of a sore spot for the promising alternative ensemble. Nevertheless, The Tragically Hip's sweaty, blues-tinged style of rock caught on across Canada as sales of *Up To Here* surpassed the 100,000 mark there in March 1990.⁸¹ Band members, however, downplayed all of the "next big thing" gossip buzzing around them. "Personally, I haven't really noticed any change," Gordon Downie observed, while on tour in Saskatchewan at the time. "We're still eating the same lousy food and driving our same lousy breaking-down van. The crowds – the sell-out shows – that's the one thing that really impresses me. That's real, tangible stuff. Those are people that are paying money to see you; that means a lot."⁸²

In 1989 and 1990, to support the release of *Up To Here*, The Tragically Hip crisscrossed Canada and the United States with an almost endless string of one-nighters.

⁷⁹ Potter, "Kingston Guys Take a Ticket to Ride."

⁸⁰ Mayes, "Hip Tip Hats to Home."

⁸¹ "Gold/Platinum," *Music Canada*, accessed 16 June 2016, <http://musiccanada.com/gold-platinum>.

⁸² Mayes, "Lousy Food, Lousy van - That's Success."

Playing between 250 and 300 gigs a year meant living a zigzag existence on the highway that tested the bonds between band members and strained their relationships with loved ones.⁸³ Yet, despite the perils of the road, The Tragically Hip prided itself on delivering electrifying performances in which the group and audience collectively communicated. Canadian music journalists who attended the Kingston quintet's shows judged for themselves whether this communal authenticity actually came into being. Critical reaction proved predominantly favourable. "It's almost unbelievable how easy it is to become a fan of The Tragically Hip after seeing them live," Bohdan Gembarsky marvelled.⁸⁴ Concert reviewers repeatedly commended three aspects of the band's stagecraft: knowing how to weave fast and slow tempos, at loud and soft volumes, into a cohesive set; having an engaging, charismatic, talented frontman; and possessing the ability to demand, and draw, the crowd's undivided attention. The Tragically Hip consistently launched into its performances with both electric guitars blasting and the rhythm section pulsating a bottom-heavy groove, and maintained the intensity with every successive song. "How refreshing, and unusual, to see a group play full out all the way instead of deliberately saving itself for a contrived finale," music journalist Paul Delean remarked approvingly.⁸⁵ Critics praised the controlled, understated, and occasionally muted interplay between Rob Baker and Paul Langlois as the pair tore through riffs with steady hands. They also credited Johnny Fay's consistent, insistent, percussion and the thudding bass lines of Gord Sinclair for anchoring the action on stage. Even though this

⁸³ Greg Barr, "Tragically Hip; Unaffected by All the Hoopla," *The Ottawa Citizen*, 12 April 1990, sec. Now!

⁸⁴ Bohdan Gembarsky, "Hip Band Has Gutsy Live Show," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 4 March 1990, sec. Entertainment.

⁸⁵ Paul Delean, "Intense Tragically Hip Bound for Bigger Things," *The Gazette*, 26 November 1989, sec. Entertainment.

kind of prized teamwork fuelled each one of The Tragically Hip's live shows, the lion's share of attention from the Canadian music press gravitated toward the idiosyncratic lead vocalist.

Gordon Downie, unquestionably, formed the focal point of the Kingston quintet's concerts. Music journalists in Canada noticed that Downie transformed when he entered the spotlight. "The lead singer of The Tragically Hip leaves his mild-mannered persona behind and turns into this shaking, twitching and grimacing apparition, possessed by the soul of the late Jim Morrison," Greg Barr informed his readership. "Or something like that."⁸⁶ The out-of-controllability of Downie's body spawned both pleasure and fear in critics. From one point of view, his "spastic" movements and "madman" antics represented the throes of ecstasy and the experience of transcendence.⁸⁷ At the same time, though, Downie's theatrics challenged corporeal expectations, producing trepidation in some onlookers. Either way, the norms of ableism structured this recurring type of media commentary. Out-of-controllability, although its roots stretched back to American jazz and dance musics from the first half of the twentieth century, had constituted a persistent feature of rock practice since the 1960s.⁸⁸ No wonder Downie's moves on stage prompted comparisons to Morrison, The Doors dynamo. One cynical journalist suggested that affectation animated the Kingston native's gyrations. "This is all I've ever been able to do," Downie responded. "I can really only sing when I get myself to a certain point. I can't stand still; I've tried."⁸⁹ The frenetic vocalist made clear he

⁸⁶ Greg Barr, "The Tragically Hip Go Wild," *The Ottawa Citizen*, 30 December 1989, sec. Entertainment.

⁸⁷ Gembarsky, "Hip Band Has Gutsy Live Show"; Roch Parisien, "Tragically Hip Come of Age for 3,000 Congress Centre Fans," *The Ottawa Citizen*, 14 April 1990, sec. Entertainment.

⁸⁸ George McKay, *Shakin' All over: Popular Music and Disability* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013), 1. The author garnered the term "out-of-controllability" from McKay as well.

⁸⁹ Mayes, "Lousy Food, Lousy van - That's Success."

adhered to the ideal of authenticity. Ultimately, despite the occasional criticism, Downie developed a solid reputation as a populist frontman who bantered easily with the crowd.

In Canada, at the turn of the 1980s, The Tragically Hip's fame derived chiefly from word-of-mouth. The band earned fans the hard way, through, with few exceptions, captivating shows. Canadian university students comprised the first substantial demographic to embrace The Tragically Hip. The alternative rock group eventually expanded its appeal to larger off-campus audiences as well. "People are giving us some pretty generous reactions," Paul Langlois relayed in early 1990.⁹⁰ Most music journalists who saw the Kingston quintet live ascribed communal authenticity to the up-and-coming troupe. "Beyond the gritty clenched-teeth thrill of its no-frills music, The Tragically Hip offered the excitement of witnessing a band and audience communicating on the most basic level," reporter Mark LePage remarked. "The band cooked like a house afire for almost two hours, and the crowd danced as they burned."⁹¹ Critics also described how ticket holders responded to the hedonic recital unfolding before them with fist pumps, riotous applause, impromptu chants, and boisterous calls for encore performances. Some adventurous attendees, both young men and women, even stage dived. Interestingly, during the *Up To Here* epoch, Canadian music press coverage of The Tragically Hip never problematized the gender composition of the group's audience. It must have seemed properly balanced to reporters.

The Tragically Hip struggled to make headway in the lucrative American market. While the ensemble soaked up the ambiance of Memphis to record *Up To Here*, that did not ensure immediate acceptance in the United States. The band played a number of

⁹⁰ Nick Krewen, "Tragically a Hit," *The Hamilton Spectator*, 17 February 1990, sec. Entertainment.

⁹¹ Mark LePage, "Tragically Hip Ready to Power Their Way to the Top of Rock Pile Credits," *The Gazette*, 14 April 1990, sec. Entertainment.

shows in different cities across the massive country in support of its debut LP for MCA Records. Some places turned out more receptive than others. “Being in these towns is great – we got to go a hockey game in Boston – but you can’t go on stage thinking that one particular show is going to make you,” Gordon Downie cautioned. “It takes a long time.”⁹² The Tragically Hip managed to develop a few small pockets of success in America, yet failed to breakthrough there in a major way. Unfazed, the group started planning its return to the studio.

Caution Horses

Three days of hell. That is how Cowboy Junkies lead singer Margo Timmins described a troublesome recording session from April 1989. The minimalist roots-inspired group had assembled in the Sharon Temple to recapture the atmospheric, melancholy quality of the band’s critically acclaimed major label debut album.⁹³ “We tried to do it the same way as *Trinity Session*, but we were having trouble getting the sound together,” Timmins recalled. “All kinds of things were interfering. I was cold, tired, and I just wanted to go home. My vocals were flat and to the point. There was no prettiness at all.”⁹⁴ In the end, the Sharon Temple tapes yielded a set of tracks that seemed too dark and moody, even by Cowboy Junkies standards. Consternation reigned over at the record company. This fresh material did not meet corporate expectations. “We took the perspective of this being a growth album for the band, with the Sharon sessions being a work-in-progress,” Jim

⁹² Tim Arsenault, “The Tragically Hip’s Raunchy Rock Sound Breaks New Ground,” *The Chronicle Herald*, 25 April 1990, sec. Entertainment.

⁹³ The Sharon Temple constituted an all-wood colonial-era religious edifice, located about fifty kilometres north of Toronto, without so much as a metal nail to exhaust the organic vibe.

⁹⁴ Greg Barr, “Junkies: From Hell to Hit; Canadian Group’s Willowy Singer Says Prettiness an Important Musical Attribute,” *The Ottawa Citizen*, 26 May 1990, sec. Entertainment.

Campbell, marketing director at BMG Music Canada, explained. “This gave them time to reshape the record to everybody’s satisfaction.”⁹⁵ So, after extensive touring around the world throughout the summer and fall of 1989, during which Cowboy Junkies reworked all of these new songs live, the group headed into an actual sound recording studio for the very first time that December to make *The Caution Horses*.

Cowboy Junkies realized its decision to cut tracks in a high-tech conventional studio might become a bone of contention with music critics and fans of the alternative troupe. For guitarist and bandleader Michael Timmins, developing the ensemble’s sound without losing the magic ambience of the last LP represented the primary challenge:

In recording *The Caution Horses* at Eastern Studios in Toronto, the way we did it, we did not abandon the foundation we laid in *The Trinity Session*. Basically, we set up live and played from the floor. There was a bit of a process involved – the instruments and the arrangements are a bit richer, more textured, and there’s more variety in tempos – but it’s all quite natural-sounding. *The Caution Horses* is faithful, in its way, to its roots.⁹⁶

Timmins affirmed that, despite recording in an artificial climate, the group’s commitment to sonic fidelity remained intact. Returning producer Peter Moore used ambisonic microphones to help Cowboy Junkies capture the immediacy of its performances on tape. The band initially found Eastern Sound Studios a pretty cold, clinical place. Cowboy Junkies worked hard to make the space conform to it rather than having the group adjust to the sterile environment. The Toronto octet transformed its new surroundings by dimming the lighting and bringing in fresh flowers.⁹⁷ Although Moore miked every individual player separately in different sections of the room, the entire outfit could still

⁹⁵ Lenny Stoute, “The Agony and the Ecstasy,” *Network*, March 1990.

⁹⁶ John Griffin, “A Voice for ‘New Country,’” *Country*, June 1990.

⁹⁷ In addition to the four core members of Cowboy Junkies – Michael Timmins, Alan Anton, Margo Timmins, and Peter Timmins – the band now featured four supplementary musicians: Jaro Czerwinec, Jeff Bird, Kim Deschamps, and Dave Houghton.

see each other directly and hear one another through cutting-edge monitors. Cowboy Junkies recorded several takes of all ten songs on *The Caution Horses* in one long wintry day. In almost every case the second try registered as the keeper. The band's first attempts generally sounded not quite settled, whereas third and fourth takes often felt overly controlled.⁹⁸ The group kept studio trickery to a minimum and let the tunes speak for themselves.

Michael Timmins, who penned eight of the subdued country-blues pieces on *The Caution Horses*, deliberately set out to write strong narratives anchored by complex characters. His recently discovered lyrical maturity evolved from an appreciation of Texas folk music composers. "I listened to a lot of Nanci Griffith and Townes Van Zandt," Timmins shared. "And for a couple of weeks, Butch Hancock came out on the road with us. And to watch a veteran songwriter who has written over 500 songs perform every night was a real learning experience and a great inspiration. I felt I really paid attention to the craft of songwriting."⁹⁹ Timmins spent most of his time between records honing his creative writing skills. Cowboy Junkies ran across the album title while touring through the southern United States, written in large bold print on the back of a truck trailer: CAUTION – HORSES. For the band, the juxtaposition of the two words functioned as an abstract description of the fictional figures on the LP. Caution suggested reticence and fear. Horses, meanwhile, symbolized a certain amount of freedom and power. "You put them together and get the ambivalence which hopefully the characters

⁹⁸ David Houghton, "Taming the Horses: Junkies' Percussionist Explains Recording Techniques," *Canadian Musician*, April 1990.

⁹⁹ Nick Krewen, "The Cowboy Junkies: Even after Worldwide Success, Some Things Haven't Changed for the Toronto Quartet," *The Hamilton Spectator*, 10 March 1990, sec. Entertainment.

reflect,” the bandleader pointed out.¹⁰⁰ Nonetheless, as the singer for Cowboy Junkies, Margo Timmins brought her own interpretation to all of the lyrics she intoned, sometimes giving the words a whole other unintended dimension. She often looked for the subtle strength and hidden promise within the desperately sad personalities her brother had envisioned. She wanted listeners to believe in the emotional stories she weaved with her whispery vocals.¹⁰¹

In February 1990, Cowboy Junkies released “Sun Comes Up, It’s Tuesday Morning” as the first single from *The Caution Horses*. From the sprightly strumming of Michael Timmins on electric guitar and Alan Anton’s understated bass play to the spare drumming of Peter Timmins and Dave Houghton’s gentle percussion, a host of sounds established the rhythmic and harmonic foundation of the languid track, and maintained the same steady, tight groove throughout it. Jaro Czerwinec’s winsome accordion lines punctuated the whole tune, while Jeff Bird’s breezy harmonica riffs and the evocative pedal steel guitar plucking of Kim Deschamps each provided melodic counterpoints at different recurring stages of “Sun Comes Up, It’s Tuesday Morning.” Margo Timmins delivered soft, mournful vocals that told a story about a day in the life of a young urban woman who just broke up with her boyfriend.¹⁰² The narrative unfolded in an uncommon stream-of-consciousness mode as the protagonist hesitantly embraced living alone again. Cowboy Junkies married wistful musical sound and vividly illustrative lyrics to strike an uneasy balance between loss and tentative renewal. By having its opening single communicate the perspective of a confident woman and detail the way women feel about

¹⁰⁰ John Mackie, “Major Blues: Cowboy Junkies Is a Band That’s Popped Right out of Left Field and Hit the Big Time,” *The Vancouver Sun*, 7 June 1990, sec. Sevendays.

¹⁰¹ Julia Nunes, “Hitting the Trail with Caution Horses: Toronto’s Cowboy Junkies Say Their New Album Offers a Different Breed of Music,” *The Globe and Mail*, 15 March 1990, sec. Entertainment.

¹⁰² To view the lyrics for “Sun Comes Up, It’s Tuesday Morning” by Cowboy Junkies, see Appendix 3.6.

men, the band subverted the gender norms informing the discourse of sonic authenticity back then. Nearly all practitioners and pundits expected rock music in Canada to deal with men and their emotions, especially those regarding women. Although unorthodox in both style and form, “Sun Comes Up, It’s Tuesday Morning” did fairly well on Canadian radio. It peaked at number twenty-two on the *RPM* 100 Singles chart that June.¹⁰³

The Caution Horses ranked as a must-to-review album in 1990 for members of the Canadian music press. Given the sudden and stunning success of *The Trinity Session*, Cowboy Junkies expected this type of intense media scrutiny. Critical reaction to the new record, though, varied widely. Several music journalists penned glowing assessments that raved about the band’s melodious maturation. Virtually all of them focused on siblings Michael and Margo Timmins, the two most important poles in the group. Many critics argued that the emergence of Michael Timmins as a distinctive songwriter warranted the ascription of sonic authenticity. Nick Krewen, for instance, thought Timmins had a mystical, charming way with words: “He seems adept at accurately pinpointing the emotional purgatory within the human psyche, and the kaleidoscopic swings of reflection and indecision that determine the next step of a person’s behavior.”¹⁰⁴ Timmins composed lyrics that Krewen found serious, insightful, and, therefore, worthy of emulation. Unlike previous Cowboy Junkies LPs, where cover tunes dominated, *The Caution Horses* featured original pieces mostly. This conspicuous shift stemmed from Michael Timmins stepping to the fore as an imagistic songwriter. The discourse of sonic authenticity prized originality deeply. Little surprise, then, that music journalists applauded the Toronto troupe’s modification of its source material. Critics also praised

¹⁰³ “RPM - Library and Archives Canada,” accessed 3 May 2016, <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/rpm>.

¹⁰⁴ Nick Krewen, “Junkies’ Fans Get Double Treat: Band and New Album Both Roll into Hamilton Monday,” *The Hamilton Spectator*, 10 March 1990, sec. Entertainment.

Margo Timmins's singing on *The Caution Horses*. Her intimate tone and hypnotic delivery, coupled with a newfound forcefulness, generated reams of affirmative commentary. "I'm confident with my vocals that I can put more aggression into the songs than I have in the past," Margo Timmins explained.¹⁰⁵

A few other Canadian music journalists expressed adverse reactions to *The Caution Horses*. These critics felt that Cowboy Junkies had merely offered more of the same bucolic, roots-tinged rock that catapulted the band to international fame in the late 1980s. Alan Niester argued that the Toronto group's brand new effort seemed to mimic *The Trinity Session*.¹⁰⁶ This lack of innovation convinced Niester that *The Caution Horses* did not warrant the ascription of sonic authenticity. For Michel Bilodeau, not only did subsequent Cowboy Junkies LPs seem unusually similar, the songs on *The Caution Horses* sounded almost indistinguishable from one another. "L'homogénéité, tant au niveau du son que du rythme, entraîne une certaine monotonie," Bilodeau maintained.¹⁰⁷ Be that as it may, band members remained unperturbed by the negative criticism. Margo Timmins had prepared herself for a media fallout. She even welcomed it. "One thing we want this album to do is get rid of the myth or the phenomenon of Cowboy Junkies," Timmins revealed during a promotional interview for *The Caution Horses*. "Hopefully everything will be back on a normal level. Last year it got a little out of hand."¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ Greg Barr, "Aggression: It's the New Word in Vocals for Margo and the Cowboy Junkies," *The Ottawa Citizen*, 16 March 1990, sec. Now!

¹⁰⁶ Alan Niester, "Inside the Sleeve: Cowboy Junkies Return with More of the Same," *The Globe and Mail*, 8 February 1990, sec. Entertainment.

¹⁰⁷ Translation by author: "Homogeneity, both in terms of sound and rhythm, provokes a particular monotony." Michel Bilodeau, "Le rock," *Le Soleil*, 24 March 1990, sec. Les arts et spectacles.

¹⁰⁸ Tim Arsenault, "Cowboy Junkies' Timmins Prefers Life in Slow Lane," *The Chronicle Herald*, 17 March 1990, sec. Entertainment.



Image 3.4: Cowboy Junkies promotional photograph from 1990.¹⁰⁹

Somebody had to be the public face of Cowboy Junkies. Margo Timmins just happened to have the best bone structure of the bunch. Accordingly, while Michael Timmins defined the group's sound and artistic vision, his younger sister, Margo, handled a majority of the personal interviews and posed for most of the band's publicity photographs. By 1990, after spending nearly two years in the limelight, Margo Timmins

¹⁰⁹ "Cowboy Junkies." BMG Music Canada Publicity Photograph. Canada: BMG Music Canada, 1990. Library and Archives Canada, *RPM fonds*. <http://collectionscanada.gc.ca> (accessed 14 January 2017). This photograph captures Margo Timmins.

had become a fairly big celebrity in the United States and Canada. The largest American weekly magazine, *People*, listed Timmins in its inaugural “The 50 Most Beautiful People in the World” that May. Then, at year’s end, the lionized vocalist secured a spot on “The *Maclean’s* 1990 Honor Roll: Twelve who make a difference.” How did all of this flattery and attention affect Timmins? “I’m taking everything in stride,” she answered assuredly. “However, since my face is getting out there, I’m taking more control of lights, of my hair and what angles I’m being shot from; that sort of thing. At first I didn’t want to appear vain, so I hung back. Now I won’t let anyone else do my makeup.”¹¹⁰ Timmins managed not to take her star status too seriously. At the same time, though, she understood the power and necessity of cultivating her image.

¹¹⁰ Stoute, “The Agony and the Ecstasy.”



Image 3.5: Cowboy Junkies promotional photograph from 1990.¹¹¹

Cowboy Junkies modified its visual identity in 1990 chiefly through the music video for “Sun Comes Up, It’s Tuesday Morning.” The protracted commercial began with a close-up shot of an empty pair of men’s black leather dress shoes lying on the floor. Sunrays cascaded over them. Morning light poured through an open bedroom window blind, waking a young, middle class, pale-skinned woman from her nocturnal

¹¹¹ “Cowboy Junkies.” BMG Music Canada Publicity Photograph. Canada: BMG Music Canada, 1990. Library and Archives Canada, *RPM fonds*. <http://collectionscanada.gc.ca> (accessed 14 January 2017). In the photograph, from left to right, stand Michael Timmins, Margo Timmins, Peter Timmines, and Alan Anton.

slumber.¹¹² The narrative video approximately illustrated the song's lyrics, creating a dynamic relationship between the sounds of "Sun Comes Up, It's Tuesday Morning" and the series of images unfolding on film. Still, given the fragmentary and ambiguous nature of the postmodern medium, the video only hinted at the female protagonist's personality, mood, and desires without ever fully disclosing them. Visual cues simply bolstered lyrical and sonic markers to suggest a story line of heartache and hopefulness. This stylized dramatization ultimately served to advertise Cowboy Junkies as real rock recording artists in Canada. The director interspersed several well lit, mid shot, complimentary clips of Margo Timmins lip-syncing the song throughout the video for "Sun Comes Up, It's Tuesday Morning." With her mop of long brown curls, delicate makeup, and a satin white Western style embroidered long sleeve shirt, she looked the part of a contemporary country-tinged-rock crooner. Timmins had shed her shy, vulnerable image. She now exhibited an unassuming confidence and mellow warmth. The other three core band members – Michael Timmins, Alan Anton, and Peter Timmins – each briefly appeared in a couple of swift performance shots that the director superimposed over domestic footage of Cali Timmins. The men sported casual attire and seemed disinterested in being on screen, projecting a detachment from the whole promotional endeavour. Their designed aloofness functioned as a bid for embodied authenticity. For roots rockers in Canada, looking like you cared more about the music than fashion signalled genuineness.

On 12 March 1990, at the Convention Centre in Hamilton, Ontario, Cowboy Junkies launched an extended series of live performances to support the international

¹¹² Professional actor Cali Timmins, the younger sister of Michael and Margo Timmins, portrayed this character in the video.

release of *The Caution Horses*. The band sardonically dubbed it “The Backlash 1990 Tour,” as the group’s honeymoon with music journalists and rock enthusiasts started to wane. Cowboy Junkies played just a handful of Canadian gigs that spring in plush theatres or concert halls for capacity crowds of up to 2400 people per night.¹¹³ Not every show went so well, though. In late May 1990, at Theatre St. Denis in the City of Saints, half of the seats remained noticeably empty. “Part of the reason for the poor turnout has to be the generally weak concert market in Montréal over the past few months,” critic Brendan Kelly explained. “But there was an element of backlash, too.”¹¹⁴ Kelly thought such feeble attendance signalled a deeper problem: an excessive number of consumers would rather experience Cowboy Junkies at home on the stereo than in an auditorium live on stage. In other words, the band lacked communal authenticity.

During the spring of 1990, when Cowboy Junkies played a limited number of gigs in major centres across Canada, the band furnished its stage to convey a sense of hominess. Long tattered white curtains hung at various heights from mock windows and skylights; front and centre there rested a high wooden chair and round linen-covered table that held a lit candle, some carnations in a vase, and a wine glass; plus a replica wrought-iron fence lined the backdrop. The band projected a series of slides on the rear setting during the show. Desolate shots of abandoned buildings, snow-topped trees, and empty railroad tracks amplified the eerie vibe of the Gothic household scene. Each night on stage, for nearly two hours, Cowboy Junkies delivered its roots-inflected rock to hushed crowds. Most Canadian music journalists praised the introspective Toronto group’s concerts. “It practically takes a thesaurus to come up with all the right words to describe a

¹¹³ Cowboy Junkies spent the rest of its time and energy in 1990 touring Europe, the United States, Australia, and Japan.

¹¹⁴ Brendan Kelly, “Junkies’ Return Less than Rousing,” *The Gazette*, 29 May 1990, sec. Entertainment.

live performance of the Cowboy Junkies – ethereal, moody, melancholy, tasteful, thoughtful, uplifting, to name a few off-the-cuff,” Roch Parisien wrote glowingly.¹¹⁵ Not all critics agreed, however. Alison Mayes, for instance, found the sound of the ensemble’s atmospheric web to be “stifling.”¹¹⁶

Canadian music journalists debated the overall merit of each Cowboy Junkies gig. The collective communication of the lead singer and the seven-piece band always figured prominently in all their assessments. “Margo [Timmins] has indeed acquired a more confident stage presence and wider vocal range,” Greg Barr informed his readership.¹¹⁷ Critics relished how the once painfully demure vocalist had blossomed into a self-assured, engaging front person. Despite still alternating between sitting impassively and standing stoically with both hands gripping the microphone as she sang, Timmins displayed some charming humour and upbeat warmth in her chatty anecdotes between songs. The growth and improvement of her sonorous voice most impressed music journalists. Timmins now crooned slowly, haltingly, lifting the full emotion out of each lyric. Reporter John Lyons thought her newfound sultry, evocative singing style justified the price of admission alone.¹¹⁸ Critics also consistently admired the strong performances of the instrumentalists in Cowboy Junkies. In particular, the supporting cast of guest musicians provided a collage of mandolin, harmonica, pedal steel, percussion, and accordion that boosted the drive of each piece, while adding considerable nuance and

¹¹⁵ Roch Parisien, “Cowboy Junkies a Band of Subtle Qualities,” *The Ottawa Citizen*, 28 May 1990, sec. Entertainment.

¹¹⁶ Alison Mayes, “Cowboy Junkies Less than Complete Triumph,” *Calgary Herald*, 7 June 1990, sec. Entertainment.

¹¹⁷ Greg Barr, “Cowboy Junkies Take Risks, Fill in Musical Gaps,” *The Ottawa Citizen*, 18 March 1990, sec. Entertainment.

¹¹⁸ John Lyons, “Cowboy Junkies Saddles up for 95 Minutes of Great Music,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, 26 May 1990, sec. Entertainment.

colour. All of the band members prized subtlety and dedicated themselves to making the most impact with the least amount of playing. Michael Timmins, the group's musical director, sat off to the side of the stage, hunched over his electric guitar, his dark hair obscuring his pale face. Concert reviewers noted the tightness of the ensemble and the directness of focus on display, and ascribed communal authenticity to Cowboy Junkies accordingly.

Audience membership and participation featured prominently in discussions about the Toronto octet's live performances. Canadian music journalists admired how appreciative ticket holders acted: enthusiastic cheers of recognition greeted familiar tunes and, at the end of each show, a standing ovation led to calls for an encore. Critics also marvelled at the attentiveness of attendees. At peak junctures of a typical Cowboy Junkies recital, the crowd seemed to be collectively holding its breath, afraid to spoil the quiet intimacy of the moment. Communal authenticity materialized. The roots-inspired rock band turned any given concert hall into a church-like space, wherein talking, while not exactly forbidden, would appear rude for breaking the reticent mood. Music journalist Nick Krewen illustrated this point rather harshly in his Cowboy Junkies concert review from March 1990:

Unfortunately, there was a group of foul-mouthed drunken boneheads who sat at a table close to me and who didn't shut up for the entire show. They were inconsiderate to the rest of the tables in the cabaret-style audience, audibly complaining about their jobs in construction and a steel factory. There is a time and a place for everything. If you want to get drunk, don't bother showing up at a Junkies' concert. It's a certain vibe, a certain clientele, and the fact that you ruined it for so many other paying customers with your obnoxious dialogue shows how insensitive you really are.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ Nick Krewen, "Ride 'Em Cowboy: Cowboy Junkies Show They're New Masters of the Musical Jam," *The Hamilton Spectator*, 13 March 1990, sec. Entertainment.

Krewen's condescending tirade berated a few proletarian chums for violating decorum at the Cowboy Junkies performance in Hamilton, Ontario. It served to reinforce lines of exclusion and inclusion based upon an upper-middle-class understanding of music appreciation, one that the Toronto troupe advocated as well.

"Things change, and the fact is the Cowboy Junkies have become a big business," bandleader Michael Timmins conceded.¹²⁰ No longer just an independent roots rock quartet, the commercially successful group now paid for the services of four sessional musicians and a small veteran road crew, not to mention the cost of management commissions, retainers for lawyers, and accountant fees. To keep the Cowboy Junkies enterprise afloat, bashful band members swallowed a bit of pride and took advantage of good publicity opportunities when they could. Being a close-knit, family ensemble afforded certain benefits. Coming from the same affluent background meant that Cowboy Junkies shared a similar appreciation of money, allowing the group to make united financial decisions. "When we're deciding whether we should spend more on buying a new monitor system or split it up and each go buy a house or something," Margo Timmins shared, "we all tend to think, let's go buy the monitor system."¹²¹ The Timmins siblings simply wanted to continue playing what they considered quality rock music for a living. In March 1990, Cowboy Junkies shipped over a million copies of *The Caution Horses* to retail stores around the world.¹²² It only took three months for the album to reach the platinum sales mark in Canada.¹²³ As before, a vast majority of the

¹²⁰ Mitch Potter, "Junkies and Junos Make Strange Bedfellows," *The Toronto Star*, 16 March 1990, sec. Entertainment.

¹²¹ Alison Mayes, "Cowboy Junkies," *Calgary Herald*, 15 March 1990, sec. Entertainment.

¹²² Nunes, "Hitting the Trail with Caution Horses: Toronto's Cowboy Junkies Say Their New Album Offers a Different Breed of Music."

¹²³ "Gold/Platinum," *Music Canada*, accessed 7 June 2016, <http://musiccanada.com/gold-platinum>.

consumer demand stemmed from abroad. The extraordinary accomplishment of Cowboy Junkies served to reinforce the oft-wavering faith of Canadian recording artists that the surest way to achieve widespread attention involved remaining loyal to their own aesthetic opinions despite any initial lack of commercial interest. “The most important thing we’ve learned over the last few years is that you don’t have to have a hit or sound like everybody else to make it in this business,” Michael Timmins relayed. “You can stay true to yourself.”¹²⁴ Timmins claimed that autonomy and personal fidelity, core tenets of folkloric authenticity, fuelled the ensemble’s success as a rock music act in Canada during the early 1990s.

Conclusion

This chapter sketched out the evolution of the discourse about authenticity in Canada at the turn of the 1980s, when a changing of the guard in English-Canadian rock music emerged. Expressing a sense of place increasingly factored into critical assessments of what constituted genuineness. Several Canadian music journalists accused Glass Tiger of catering to American tastes too much with its corporate friendly material. Blue Rodeo, on the other hand, mined roots music from the United States to create an LP that struck many critics – unironically – as distinctly Canadian. Music journalists differed in their opinions of The Tragically Hip. Some lamented the Americanization of the Kingston quintet’s sound on *Up To Here*, while others thought the album redefined rock music in Canada. In all these cases, a sense of place mattered most in the discourse about authenticity. This chapter suggested that the political and economic condition of

¹²⁴ Griffin, “A Voice for ‘New Country.’”

neoliberalism, specifically, Canada's adoption of a Free Trade Agreement with the United States in 1989, fostered that substantial discursive shift. Discussions of race curtailed during the changing of the guard. Of the four bands examined in this chapter, only The Tragically Hip delved significantly into a traditionally non-White genre of music to produce its latest recording. Because Whiteness routinely operated as an unarticulated presupposition underlying deliberations of rock legitimacy, considerations of race surfaced in the discourse about authenticity solely when critics and musicians contemplated African American cultural contributions. Finally, hetero-patriarchy still undergirded most conversations about genuine rock music in Canada: from lyrical content and music video techniques to audience composition and the negotiation of commerce. Cowboy Junkies, however, provided a rare exception by subverting the gender norms at play in rock culture.

This chapter also showed how, through the indispensable medium of music video, the cultural condition of postmodernism persisted during the changing of the guard in English-Canadian rock music at the end of the 1980s. Glass Tiger shed its New Romantic image for a less ostentatious look, complete with denim jeans and leather jackets. Although the Newmarket quintet insisted its visual identity had changed "naturally," the move appeared somewhat calculated to observers. Blue Rodeo, The Tragically Hip, and Cowboy Junkies each made a concerted effort to minimize the importance of image by dressing casually and making videos that placed emphasis on its musical material. These roots rockers displayed an approach to visual identity that marked a clear departure from the exceedingly stylized New Romantic movement of yesteryear. The flip side of this deviation from the status quo found expression in the studio, where Blue Rodeo, The

Tragically Hip, and Cowboy Junkies all employed recording techniques that captured the performers “live off the floor” as an ensemble. By stressing the importance of sonic fidelity, these bands repudiated the highly processed way in which Glass Tiger and other popular glossy acts generated music at the time – wherein signs of the real substituted for the real. The understated images and organic sounds of roots rock outfits in Canada represented a backlash against the economic and political condition of neoliberalism. This disarticulation of dominant ideologies fuelled a changing of the guard in English-Canadian rock music at the turn of the 1980s.

Appendix 3.1: Lyrics for Glass Tiger's "I'm Still Searching"

Ah, the rumors are vicious, my ears are burning, it's been a long hard day
Telephone rings, still got nothing to say
Considerations tossed out the window, I feel a little bit wired
The rules say anything goes, but I don't wanna play
You said I could walk away, take me back to where my life burns

I'm still searching for something
I'm still looking for someone
But I'm caught in the middle
Of a broken heart and a life on the run

Took a long walk down through the backstreets, I heard the city scream
Reminds me of the time I run wicked and free
Now here I stand all alone, but I'm back to where my life burns

I'm still searching for something
I'm still looking for someone
But I'm caught in the middle
Of a broken heart and a life on the run

One heart, one home
But I'm still holding on
I've loved, I've roamed
Now I'm going home, going home, yeah

I'm still searching for something
I'm still looking for someone
But I'm caught in the middle
Of a broken heart and a life on the run
I'm still searching for something
I'm still looking for someone
But I'm caught in the middle
Of a broken heart and a life on the run
Broken heart and a life on the run
A broken heart, life on the run

Appendix 3.2: Lyrics for Glass Tiger's "This Island Earth"

Oh, I have this feeling, it's so revealing
Silence surrounds you, you stand all alone
And in the darkness I still can find you
For light is shining from deep within

Oh, Is this all it's worth?
Oh, Is this all it's worth?
This island earth
This island earth

I see the children lost in the city
We break the hearts of both the young and old
I see the need here, oh, to feed the hungry
As dollar bills lie within your hands

Oh, is this all it's worth?
Yeah!
Oh, is this all it's worth?
This island earth
This island earth

I see you
I feel you
I love you
Oh, I feed you
I touch you
I need you
I want you
I bleed you
What does it matter?
Really doesn't matter
What does it matter?
Really doesn't matter to me
This island earth

Oh, is this all it's worth?
Oh, is this all it's worth?
This island earth

Appendix 3.3: Lyrics for Glass Tiger's "Diamond Sun"

When they came to this land
We gave our friendship, gave them our hands
But it was never to be, oh, "You must bow down"
They said, "Fall to your knees"

Oh, diamond sun has to burn
Oh, are we never to learn
Oh, love gives life and life is love
But what have we done

We have walked on this earth
Since the first star was shining
And the moon had its birth
But as with the shadows
Of lonely trees
We are in bondage
But our hearts are still free

Oh, diamond sun has to burn
Oh, are we never to learn
Oh, love gives life and life is love
But what have we done

Still diamond sun has to burn
Oh, are we never to learn
Still diamond sun has to burn

In my heart I believe
Someday the sun will shine
You shall be free
And bless our children
As they're put to the test
You'll feel the heartbeat
Of a nation's unrest

Oh, diamond sun has to burn
Oh, are we never to learn
Oh, love gives life and life is love
But what have we done
Oh, love gives life and life is love
What have we done, what have we done

Appendix 3.4: Lyrics for Blue Rodeo's "Diamond Mine"

And our love shines
Like a diamond mine

You say the party's over
But like a drunken fool I never know when to leave
It's just that in the eyes of this beholder
You mean everything to me

Yea you say that you don't love me
Yea you talk about the other boys and you laugh in my face
But I know when you're feeling sad and lonely
No other boy can take my place

'Cause when I look into your eyes
Well our love (our love) shines
Yea our love (our love) shines
Like a diamond mine

Nothing's as obvious as what is lost
Nothing's as painful as the cost
Let it shine
Let it shine
Like a diamond mine

And I hear all these rumours about you
Yea the trash lines up at my door just to bring me the news
But all it does is make me kind of wonder
Why are people so eager to be so cruel?

'Cause when I look into your eyes
Well our love (our love) shines
Yea our love (our love) shines
Yea our love (our love) shines
Like a diamond mine
Like a diamond mine
Like a diamond mine

Appendix 3.5: Lyrics for The Tragically Hip's "Blow At High Dough"

They shot a movie once in my hometown
Everybody was in it from miles around
Out at the speedway, some kind of Elvis thing
Well, I ain't no movie star but I can get behind anything
Yeah, I can get behind anything

Get it out, get it all out, yeah, stretch that thing
Make it last, make it last, at least till the supper bell rings
Well, the taxi driver liked his rhythm, never liked the stops
Throes of passion, throes of passion, then something just threw him off

Well, sometimes the faster it gets the less you need to know
But you got to remember the smarter it gets the further it's going to go
When you blow at high dough
When you blow at high dough

Woa, baby, I feel fine, I'm pretty sure it's genuine
It makes no sense, no, it makes no sense, but I'll take it free any time
Whoever fits her usually gets her, it was the strangest thing
How'd she move so fast, move so fast, into that wedding ring

Well, sometimes the faster it gets the less you need to know
But you got to remember the smarter it gets the further it's going to go
When you blow at high dough
When you blow at high dough

Out at the speedway, same Elvis thing
Well, I can't catch her but I can get behind anything
Yeah, I can get behind anything
Well, I can get behind anything

Well, sometimes the faster it gets the less you need to know
But you got to remember the smarter it gets the further it's going to go
When you blow at high dough
When you blow at high dough

Yeah, blow at high dough
Blow at high Dough
Oh blow

Out at the speedway, same Elvis thing

Appendix 3.6: Lyrics for Cowboy Junkies' "Sun Comes Up, It's Tuesday Morning"

Sun comes up, it's Tuesday morning
Hits me straight in the eye
Guess you forgot to close the blind last night
Oh, that's right, I forgot, it was me

I sure do miss the smell of black coffee in the morning,
The sound of water splashing all over the bathroom,
The kiss that you would give me even though I was sleeping,
But I kind of like the feel of this extra few feet in my bed
Telephone's ringing, but I don't answer it
'Cause everybody knows good news always sleeps till noon

Guess it's tea and toast for breakfast again
Maybe I'll add a little T.V. too
No milk! Oh God, how I hate that
Guess I'll go to the corner, get breakfast from Jenny
She's got a black eye this morning, 'Jen how'd ya get it?
She said, 'Last night, Bobby got a little bit out of hand'

Lunchtime. I start to dial your number
Then I remember so I reach for something to smoke
And anyways I'd rather listen to Coltrane
Than go through all that shit again

There's something about an afternoon spent doing nothing
Just listening to records and watching the sun falling
Thinking of things that don't have to add up to something
And this spell won't be broken
By the sound of keys scraping in the lock

Maybe tonight it's a movie
With plenty of room for elbows and knees
A bag of popcorn all to myself,
Black and white with a strong female lead
And if I don't like it, no debate, I'll leave

Here comes that feeling that I'd forgotten
How strange these streets feel
When you're alone on them
Each pair of eyes just filled with suggestion
So I lower my head, make a beeline for home
Seething inside

Funny, I'd never noticed
The sound the streetcars make as they pass my window
Which reminds me that I forgot to close the blind again
Yeah, sure I'll admit there are times when I miss you
Especially like now when I need someone to hold me
But there are some things that you'll never be forgiven
And I just gotta tell you
That I kinda like this extra few feet in my bed

Chapter Four: Disintegration, 1990-1992

Throughout the late twentieth century, cycles of fragmentation and reconstitution of mainstream rock styles structured the industrial production of Anglo-American sound recordings.¹ This chapter contends that the early 1990s in Canada marked a period of disintegration wherein leading rock groups produced an assorted, eclectic range of expressive modes. Most of these forms fell under the broad umbrella of alternative music: from the polished country rock of Blue Rodeo and the gritty blues-tinged rock of The Tragically Hip to the parodic folk rock of Barenaked Ladies. Glass Tiger's experimentation with trending hard rock, however, represented another significant piece of the heterogeneous mainstream puzzle. The business practices of the Anglo-American sound recording industries fostered the period of disintegration under examination. "In particular, radio stations have contributed to the fragmentation of musical markets and audiences by insisting on precise alignments of musical taste and demographic niche," communications scholar Will Straw argued.² Canadian radio broadcasters helped establish and police genre boundaries along lines of age, gender, place, and race. Furthermore, as musicologist Keith Negus determined, the corporate organizational

¹ David Hesmondhalgh, "Flexibility, Post-Fordism, and the Music Industry," in *Popular Music: Volume 2: The Rock Era*, ed. Simon Frith (New York: Routledge, 2004), 56.

² Will Straw, "Sound Recording," in *The Cultural Industries in Canada: Problems, Policies, and Prospects*, ed. Michael Dorland (Toronto: J. Lorimer & Co, 1996), 108.

systems and marketing methods of international record companies, which depended heavily on radio broadcasters to promote their products in Canada, proved integral to the division of the musical field of trade and consumers in the early 1990s.³ Nevertheless, recording artists and producers represented the individuals largely responsible for the cyclical patterns of innovation that propelled mainstream rock styles forward.

This chapter shows that during the aforementioned period of disintegration a multifaceted discourse about authenticity continued to shape what constituted legitimate rock music in Canada. Hetero-patriarchy ideology permeated lyrical content and influenced dominant understandings of proper audience composition as well as band instrumentation and appellation. Whiteness carried on as an unarticulated presupposition underlying discussions of rock authenticity, except for when White bands, such as The Tragically Hip or Barenaked Ladies, blatantly incorporated Black musical traditions and innovations in their material. In those moments, the concept of race emerged as an explicit indicator of genuineness. Exhibiting a sense of place, meanwhile, persisted in complicated ways as yet another principal marker of valid rock music. During a period of disintegration for mainstream rock in Canada, dominant understandings of gender, sexuality, race, and place individually and collectively shaped the discourse about authenticity in the early 1990s.

Throwing the Dice

Blue Rodeo took a much-needed hiatus at the start of 1990. Co-founder Greg Keelor initiated the lengthy pause to relax and re-acquaint himself with the Muse. Basically, after spending years on the go, Keelor needed a vacation from the band. “Greg wanted to

³ Keith Negus, *Music Genres and Corporate Cultures* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 55.

stop and not be Blue Rodeo any more,” Jim Cuddy recalled. “To me, that was a little despairing because you just feel like something you’ve built is crumbling away.”⁴ Blue Rodeo seemed directionless for the first time since forming. Cuddy realized the pair had to come up with new material they both liked or it would be hard to carry on. During this three-month period of reflection and reinvention, Keelor and Cuddy, each on their own, wrote lyrically downbeat songs stocked with earthy, melancholic emotion. In April 1990, Blue Rodeo reunited to rehearse in preparation for its next album. Keelor and Cuddy quickly regained their confidence in the band when Blue Rodeo finally played the latest tunes together.⁵ The pair then drew up a dream list of producers who they wanted to work with on the upcoming LP. They ultimately decided to hire American Pete Anderson because of his recent accomplishments for singer-songwriter Michelle Shocked and country music star Dwight Yoakam. Anderson, however, felt most comfortable behind the console in Los Angeles. Accordingly, Blue Rodeo flew down to sunny California that spring and recorded its third studio album there over the following six weeks.

The sessions that generated Blue Rodeo’s *Casino* did not exactly get off to the smoothest of beginnings. “The first night we went down to Los Angeles, Greg and I took acoustic guitars over to Pete Anderson’s, and we arranged all the songs,” Jim Cuddy remembered. “Some of his suggestions were pretty radical – taking choruses and switching them to verses, for example.” Greg Keelor added, “That night was a pretty drastic one. Pete had a really clear idea of what he wanted to do. As a songwriter, there’s always a certain paranoid response to other people’s suggestions, but it started to make

⁴ Wendy Cox, “Blue Rodeo Saddles up for Year-Long Tour: Jim Cuddy Faces Trip with Mix of Excitement and Dread,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, 15 January 1991, sec. Entertainment.

⁵ “Blue Rodeo Hits Casino,” *The Record*, 3 December 1990.

sense on the drive home.”⁶ Although these concessions proved hard for the leaders of Blue Rodeo to make, Cuddy and Keelor came to understand that Anderson’s concise arrangements would help them produce a cohesive collection of striking, focused, accessible tunes. Anderson shepherded Blue Rodeo toward the prospect of commercial viability in the United States. And the band went along with his ideas. “He wanted us to get the songs on the radio and nobody had any argument with that,” keyboardist Bobby Wiseman later shared.⁷

Blue Rodeo recorded *Casino*’s bed tracks of drums, bass guitar, and keyboards at Track Record Studios in North Hollywood. At first, the band played together as an ensemble to establish a feel for each tune, yet Pete Anderson only captured drummer Mark French’s performances on tape. Basil Donovan then laid down all the bass lines on his own, making sure the rhythm section remained in sync all the way through every song. Next, Bobby Wiseman added some keyboard touches. His usually lengthy and improvised contributions sounded trimmed back and dictated. “The solos were all done to Greg and Jim’s tastes,” Wiseman confided, with a hint of acrimony. “Blue Rodeo is their band and their vision. They have the say on the solos. I’m kind of like their ‘vehicle’; I’m there to help them get what they want.”⁸ At that point, with the rhythmic and harmonic foundations of the album set, everybody went back to Toronto except for Keelor and Cuddy. Those two registered the guitars and vocals for *Casino* at legendary Capitol Studios: the hallowed halls of the 1960s where Frank Sinatra cut “My Way” and the Beach Boys recorded its classic surf rock. Cuddy handled all of the acoustic playing

⁶ Bryan Howard, “Blue Rodeo: Being Themselves,” *Fan Club*, March 1991.

⁷ Roch Parisien, “Blue Rodeo’s Bobby Wiseman; Passionate Keyboard Player Is the Band’s Resident Philosopher and Wild Card,” *The Ottawa Citizen*, 8 March 1991, sec. Now!

⁸ David Henman, “Blue Rodeo: The Casino Interviews,” *Canadian Musician*, December 1990.

while Keelor did most of the harder-edged electric guitar work. The duo shared singing duties almost evenly. When it came time to mix the album, Pete Anderson and Blue Rodeo used a Fairchild compressor to clip and tighten every track to create a uniform, dry, psychedelic sound evocative of mid-period Beatles, throughout the LP.⁹

In June 1990, as Greg Keelor and Jim Cuddy completed the final adjustments on *Casino*, Blue Rodeo's manager, John Caton, unexpectedly announced his immediate retirement and the shuttering of Risque Disque. Caton had developed a serious heart problem and his independent label now faced financial ruin.¹⁰ Both bits of surprising news stunned, and saddened, Keelor and Cuddy. Blue Rodeo suddenly found itself in need of new management and a new record company. Keelor and Cuddy started calling up managers in southern California. The pair did not want to replace Caton with another friendly, parochial administrator; rather, they sought a high-powered manager that held a significant amount of clout in the United States.¹¹ Keelor and Cuddy eventually hired Danny Goldberg from the prestigious American-based Gold Mountain Entertainment to guide Blue Rodeo's affairs. Soon thereafter, the band signed on with a subsidiary of Atlantic Records called East/West. Blue Rodeo embraced the potentiality of the moment. "This is an exciting time that feels like a new beginning," Keelor suggested. "We have a new record, new management, and a new label in the States. It seems like a good way to start this record."¹²

⁹ Howard Druckman, "So Long to Saloonland," *HMV Magazine*, April 1991.

¹⁰ In 1989, Risque Disque aggressively expanded its roster based on projections that sales of Blue Rodeo's *Diamond Mine* would exceed half a million outside of Canada. *Diamond Mine*, though, sold well below those expectations, leaving the independent record company woefully overextended financially. Chris Dafoe, "Sad and Strange Record Tales," *The Toronto Star*, 30 July 1990, sec. Entertainment.

¹¹ Helen Metella, "Talent, Chutzpah Carry Blue Rodeo through the Rough," *The Edmonton Journal*, 3 December 1990, sec. Entertainment.

¹² Kerry Doole, "Loading the Dice," *Music Express*, November 1990.

Blue Rodeo released “Til I Am Myself Again” in November 1990 as the first single from *Casino*. The song opened with a ringing Rickenbacker electric guitar riff reminiscent of The Byrds’ “I’ll Feel A Whole Lot Better,” an American folk-rock music standard from 1965. A lush layering of acoustic guitars, hollow-body electric guitars, bass, drums, and organ delivered a sparse, pristine country-tinged sound. Jim Cuddy’s pliant, silky tenor lent the track its melodic savvy, while Greg Keelor’s salty complementary vocal harmonies enriched the tone of select lines and the soaring chorus. Blue Rodeo’s “Til I Am Myself Again” couched feelings of conflict and turmoil in an upbeat melody and tempo. Beneath the song’s buoyant and punchy sheen lurked a murkier world of anger, mistrust, and self-doubt. The narrative in “Til I Am Myself Again” revolved around a protagonist at loose ends, totally disconnected with himself.¹³ Far away from home and all alone, he felt compelled to leave his strange surroundings, yet did not want to do so until he returned to his usual frame of mind. Blue Rodeo’s pensive piece functioned as an extended meditation on the loss of identity and the need for its restoration. As a single, “Til I Am Myself Again” did exceptionally well in Canada during the winter of 1990-1991. It reached number three on the *RPM* 100 Hit Tracks and number one on the *RPM* 100 Country Tracks charts.¹⁴

Music journalists across Canada adored Blue Rodeo’s *Casino*. “An album to sing, dance, drink and sigh to, this is probably the year’s finest Canadian release,” Alison Mayes informed her readership.¹⁵ A first step in ascribing sonic authenticity to the record involved categorizing the collection of tunes on it. Critics noted how much the band had

¹³ To view the lyrics for Blue Rodeo’s “Til I Am Myself Again,” see Appendix 4.1.

¹⁴ “RPM - Library and Archives Canada,” accessed 3 May 2016, <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/rpm>.

¹⁵ Alison Mayes, “Recent Releases,” *Calgary Herald*, 25 November 1990, sec. Entertainment.

refined its hybrid style into sharp focus on *Casino*, successfully mainstreaming the ensemble's sound. "Blue Rodeo gambles and wins with its third album, a bold reconciliation of ragged rock roots and pop aspirations," Mark LePage determined.¹⁶ Other music journalists, while acknowledging the Toronto quintet had corralled its influences tremendously, praised Blue Rodeo's continued ability to refuse categorization and play around in uncharted sonic territory.¹⁷ Judith Fitzgerald proclaimed: "The band's music surpasses labels and transcends formula formats."¹⁸ For Fitzgerald, refusal to be tied down to a specific genre revealed artistic integrity – a hallmark of rock ideology. Nearly every review of *Casino* in the Canadian music press recognized the album as a blatant attempt to draw the attention of American radio programmers and finally crack the lucrative United States market. Yet, despite this obvious move to cash in south of the border, critics remained supportive. "Only time will tell what the commercial results will be," John Mackie predicted, "but artistically, it's a big success."¹⁹ A couple of reporters even rested their sense of justice in the music business on Blue Rodeo attaining international fame with *Casino*.²⁰ At the start of the 1990s, ironically enough, the affirmation of American consumers remained a significant marker of sonic authenticity in Canada.

¹⁶ Mark LePage, "Where Are Pogues Going?; Sadness of New Album Hints at Uncertainty," *The Gazette*, 24 November 1990, sec. Entertainment.

¹⁷ Judith Fitzgerald, "True Blue Rodeo: The 'Little Band That Grew' Plays by Its Own Rules," *Country*, January 1991; Stephen Ostick, "Blue Rodeo Takes Light Approach in New Album," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 5 January 1991, sec. Entertainment.

¹⁸ Fitzgerald, "True Blue Rodeo: The 'Little Band That Grew' Plays by Its Own Rules."

¹⁹ John Mackie, "Rock/Pop," *The Vancouver Sun*, 10 January 1991, sec. Sevendays.

²⁰ Mayes, "Recent Releases"; Ostick, "Blue Rodeo Takes Light Approach in New Album."



Image 4.1: Blue Rodeo promotional photograph from 1990.²¹

Blue Rodeo managed its image, once again, primarily through the indispensable medium of music video. The extended commercial for “Til I Am Myself Again” opened with Jim Cuddy entering the decrepit-looking Winchester Hotel in downtown Toronto. He wore black leather boots, tight pale blue jeans, a dark-print T-shirt, and a black leather jacket. Late afternoon sunlight illuminated the Art Moderne styled lobby of the heritage building as Cuddy made his way to a half-empty old pub located therein. Suddenly, the video cut to an abstract burgundy-coloured well-lit space that featured Blue Rodeo crammed on to a tiny makeshift steel stage with only its instruments, pretending to play the song. The remainder of the four-minute advertisement split screen time between illustrating the lyrical narrative of “Til I Am Myself Again” and showcasing the band’s musical abilities. It achieved the former by having Cuddy assume the role of a lone barfly

²¹ “Blue Rodeo.” Blue Rodeo promotional photograph courtesy of thecanadianencyclopedia.ca. In this photograph, from left to right, appear Bazil Donovan, Bobby Wiseman, Greg Keelor, Mark French, and Jim Cuddy.

who observed his strange, dingy environment while having a drink and pondering his hardships and failures. At the same time, the director scattered several energetic performance shots of each and every band member throughout the video, highlighting the Toronto quintet's skilled rock musicianship both individually and collectively. Casually attired and focused on its craft, Blue Rodeo projected a visual identity designed to garner embodied authenticity in the early 1990s. The lengthy commercial for "Til I Am Myself Again" concluded with a shot of Cuddy exiting the Winchester Hotel, turning his jacket collar up to the wind, and heading off into the night.

Blue Rodeo spent most of 1991 on the road in support of the international release of *Casino*.²² That January, the group launched a comprehensive forty-four-date Canadian tour that reached most major cities as well as many smaller centres. In the more populous markets, Blue Rodeo played in soft-seat theatres and concert bowls to sold-out crowds of 1500 to 3200 people each night, which encompassed no small feat considering the country suffered from a profoundly deep economic recession at the time. Music journalists who attended these shows observed both audience and band members to determine whether Blue Rodeo's live performances qualified as genuine incarnations of rock music in Canada. Critics expected the group to establish a close rapport with the audience. And the Toronto quintet nearly always did. Music journalist Brendan Kelly, for instance, relayed a poignant moment of communal authenticity from Blue Rodeo's show at the Spectrum in Montréal: "At one point, Keelor told the crowd they were 'a tasty bunch,' after a particularly appreciative round of applause, and the feeling was mutual."²³

²² In addition to Canada and the United States, Blue Rodeo released *Casino* in eighteen countries throughout Europe, Asia, and Oceania. Druckman, "So Long to Saloonland."

²³ Brendan Kelly, "Rock-Solid Spectrum Show Proves Success Hasn't Spoiled Blue Rodeo," *The Gazette*, 8 March 1991, sec. Entertainment.

Enthusiastic audience participation, from clapping and singing to cheering and demanding encores, indicated that collective communication flowed between band members and ticket holders.

Almost every critic ascribed communal authenticity to the Blue Rodeo concert they attended.²⁴ Singer-songwriter-guitarists Greg Keelor and Jim Cuddy traded the spotlight when the ensemble took the stage: each assuming the role of front man throughout the evening, introducing songs and telling stories. Music journalists admired the pair's complimentary guitar picking and incredible harmonies. Critics often overlooked the rhythmic and harmonic contributions of drummer Mark French and bassist Bazil Donovan, although they formed essential components of Blue Rodeo's sound. An unusually restrained Bobby Wiseman on keyboards, however, caught the attention of nearly all concert reviewers. Tired of his reputation for whirling-dervish stage moves, and wanting ticket holders to focus principally on his music, Wiseman toned down his antics for the *Casino* tour. "I still get into it, but I've partly changed my style so I could continue to get into it," the keyboardist explained. "I felt that I was lying to myself, that it was beginning to become simply showmanship. I even sit down now when I play."²⁵ Nonetheless, though he restricted his movements and at times looked bored, Wiseman's dazzling runs on the organ still amazed music journalists. His talent radiated for all to see and hear. "Wiseman is the virtuoso of the group," John Mackie

²⁴ Music journalist Richard Wagamese represented the lone exception out of a dozen concert reviewers. He withheld ascribing communal authenticity to Blue Rodeo's show at the Jack Singer Concert Hall in Calgary, Alberta, largely because a terrible sound mix prevented collective communication between the band and audience from occurring. Richard Wagamese, "Blue Rodeo's Performance Suffers from Homesickness," *Calgary Herald*, 10 February 1991, sec. Entertainment.

²⁵ Parisien, "Blue Rodeo's Bobby Wiseman; Passionate Keyboard Player Is the Band's Resident Philosopher and Wild Card."

declared, after catching a Blue Rodeo concert in Vancouver, British Columbia.²⁶ Fans of the Toronto-based quintet could only hope that the supremely gifted musician would remain satisfied as a bit player in the Greg and Jim Show. Ultimately, the music press in Canada ascribed communal authenticity to Blue Rodeo shows because the band demonstrated superior rock musicianship on stage.

Casino reached platinum sales status in Canada a little more than three months after its release.²⁷ This retail milestone, though significant, actually marked a commercial decline for Blue Rodeo. Its previous album had sold twice as well at the same juncture. In the coveted American market, the band made some small advances but widespread acceptance never materialized.²⁸ Blue Rodeo took the comparative lack of success stateside in stride. The group could still earn a decent living as sound recording artists in Canada, regardless. Throughout the press cycle for *Casino*, the members of Blue Rodeo repeatedly tapped into the discourse of folkloric authenticity to justify their moderate fame and fortune. “We’re not a marketing dream,” Jim Cuddy made clear. “Whatever we’ve done it’s because people relate to our music and not because people related to our image. We’re kind of a non-image band. There’s never been anything imposed on us to try and make ourselves more popular.”²⁹ Cuddy maintained that Blue Rodeo earned its commercial rewards properly, through honest creative artistry not the manipulative mechanics of advertising. He also stressed the band’s strong sense of autonomy in the face of powerful financial pressures. The Toronto quintet exuded an attitude of detached

²⁶ John Mackie, “Blue Rodeo Lassos Accolades: All-Canadian Guys Dazzle Sell-out Crowd,” *The Vancouver Sun*, 18 February 1991, sec. Entertainment.

²⁷ “Gold/Platinum,” *Music Canada*, accessed 7 July 2016, <http://musiccanada.com/gold-platinum>.

²⁸ The single “Til I Am Myself Again” hit number thirty-seven on the Billboard Mainstream Rock chart in March 1991. *Billboard*, “Mainstream Rock Songs,” accessed 12 January 2017, <http://www.billboard.com/artist/291929/Blue+Rodeo/chart?f=377>.

²⁹ Jill Lawless, “Blue Rodeo’s U.S. Gamble Pays off on *Casino*,” *RPM (Weekly)*, 15 December 1990.

amusement toward the whole music business, presenting itself as a group of serious musicians who did not take the whole machinery of rock stardom too seriously.³⁰ In doing so, Blue Rodeo signalled that it possessed folkloric authenticity.

Greetings From Saskadelphia

In the early fall of 1990, after spending the previous year relentlessly touring the United States and Canada in support of *Up To Here*, The Tragically Hip started recording its next album at Kingsway Studio, a mansion-turned-studio owned by Daniel Lanois, located in the heart of the French Quarter in New Orleans, Louisiana. Having pared down its new material to twelve main songs, the band and returning producer Don Smith strove to make an LP that sounded as close to an approximation of The Tragically Hip live as possible.³¹ To complete this task, the fellows set up their gear around a billiard table in one of the large rooms on the main floor of the grand historic abode. They recorded with everyone in the same space, performing at the same time. No isolation booths or walls separated group members from each other and the control room. Between takes, The Tragically Hip played pool and generally took it easy, hanging out in the commodious 12,000-square-foot Italianate mansion. The Kingsway offered unique resounding chambers and a relaxed atmosphere that the ensemble could not find in a more conventional, state-of-the-art studio environment. “In a house, you’ve got these natural reverbs by the hallways and staircases,” lead guitarist Rob Baker explained. “You get sunrises, sunsets, all these wonderful things that add ambience to what you’re doing or

³⁰ James Muretich, “Blue Rodeo Sings with a Tear in the Heart,” *Calgary Herald*, 20 January 1991, sec. Entertainment.

³¹ Lenny Stoute, “Forceful Yet Faceless,” *Network*, March 1991.

make you more comfortable.”³² The band relished the end result, *Road Apples*, which it released in February 1991. Executives at The Tragically Hip’s American record label rejected the original album title, *Greetings from Saskadelphia*, because they worried consumers in the United States would not understand the word play. In response, the Kingston quintet suggested *Road Apples*. MCA Records approved the new title, thinking it meant songs borne of the road. This ironic turn of events amused the members of The Tragically Hip to no end. For them, and many others in Canada, the term “road apple” actually referred to frozen horse feces.³³

Critical response to The Tragically Hip’s latest LP turned out largely laudatory, though a couple of reviews seemed lukewarm and one downright unenthusiastic.³⁴ In order for music journalists in Canada to ascribe sonic authenticity to the Kingston quintet, the band had to deliver original, innovative rock tones matched with intelligent, serious lyrics. Nearly all critics found the group musically accomplished and literate. “*Road Apples* doesn’t sound like anything but The Tragically Hip,” Chris Dafoe proclaimed to his readership. “And, at least in this case, that sounds very good indeed.”³⁵ Alain Brunet, a fellow scribe who also enjoyed the band’s current music, praised Gord Downie’s word choice: “Écrits par Downie, ces textes témoignent d’une grande habileté à faire rimer les chroniques de vie. La musicalité des mots, la substance, la rugosité sont partie prenantes

³² Kerry Doole, “A Road Apple A Day,” *HMV Magazine*, June 1991.

³³ Tom Harrison, “Tragically Hip Has No Identity Problem,” *The Province*, 1 March 1991, sec. Preview.

³⁴ The author found two mediocre reviews: Claude Beauregard, “Des textes excellents...et rien d’autre,” *Le Droit*, 2 March 1991, sec. Arts et spectacles; and Alan Niester, “Tragically Hip Promises but Doesn’t Quite Deliver,” *The Globe and Mail*, 11 March 1991, sec. Entertainment. The scathing review came from: Richard Wagamese, “Recent Releases,” *Calgary Herald*, 24 February 1991, sec. Entertainment.

³⁵ Chris Dafoe, “Hip Mixes Tasty Southern Gumbo,” *The Toronto Star*, 19 February 1991, sec. Entertainment.

de l'alliage littéraire."³⁶ The ensemble's combination of credible rock grooves and sophisticated lyrics dazzled most music journalists.

The Canadian music press explored links, both real and imagined, between the American musical mecca of the Crescent City and The Tragically Hip's distinctive blues-infused rock on *Road Apples*. Some critics speculated that the band had assimilated some Mississippi River Delta culture to expand into more vintage R&B territory.³⁷ The group repeatedly rejected this characterization. "I grew up in Kingston. I've spent my whole life here," Rob Baker made clear. "It wasn't our aim to go to New Orleans and have the spirit of zydeco take over our bodies."³⁸ Baker clarified the ensemble's relation to the African American coded genre by asserting his sense of place and denying any intent to appropriate musical Blackness. Nonetheless, critic Bill Reynolds categorized The Tragically Hip's *Road Apples* as a unique incarnation of "white-boy R&B," a genre popularized in the 1960s by the Rolling Stones, among others, in which White rock musicians emulated African American blues artists.³⁹ In this manner, the supposed authenticity of Black performers such as Muddy Waters informed and empowered the establishment of rock music as a White cultural form. Reynolds framed the Kingston quintet's mimicking of the blues as part of that enduring racialized rock tradition.

Music journalists in Canada also noticed that *Road Apples* contained a sprinkling of discernable Canadian cultural references, a first for The Tragically Hip. "Born In The

³⁶ Author's translation: "Written by Downie, these texts testify to a great ability to make the chronicles of life rhyme. The musicality of the words, the substance, the roughness are components of the literary alloy." Alain Brunet, "The Tragically Hip: Quatre soirs à guichets fermés au Spectrum," *La Presse*, 3 August 1991, sec. Arts et spectacles.

³⁷ Music journalist Chris Dafoe, for instance, articulated and developed this line of thought in *The Toronto Star*. See: Dafoe, "Hip Mixes Tasty Southern Gumbo."

³⁸ Doole, "A Road Apple A Day."

³⁹ Bill Reynolds, "No Rest for the Hip: Kingston Band Embarks for Europe after Finishing U.S. Tour," *The Globe and Mail*, 15 May 1991, sec. Entertainment.

Water,” for instance, offered a biting take on the contentious language debate unfolding in Sault Saint Marie, Ontario.⁴⁰ In January 1990, the City Council’s brazen legislation sent yet another sign to French Canadians there and throughout the land that English Canadians harboured intolerance toward them. The heated situation garnered national attention and became a flashpoint in the ongoing Meech Lake Accord impasse. Ethnic tensions flared across Canada that June as provincial and federal political leaders failed to ratify that series of constitutional amendments, one of which would have recognized Québec as a “distinct society” within the country.⁴¹ With “Born In The Water,” a saucy upbeat roadhouse number, driven by a twin electric guitar attack and supported by a pulsating rhythm section, The Tragically Hip jumped into the fray and scolded the City Council of Sault Saint Marie for its regressive and unwarranted declaration.⁴² Many a music critic in Canada thought this tune exemplified the band’s strong sense of place. “I don’t know how conscious we are of it,” Rob Baker admitted. “But we’ve always made a point of singing and writing about where we’re from and the people we know. You just

⁴⁰ In November 1989, the government of Ontario fully implemented the *French Language Services Act*, which stipulated that, in specifically designated areas of the province, government services must be offered in both official languages of the country. The *Act* did not apply to municipal government services at all, yet the Alliance for the Preservation of English in Canada, a special interest group established in 1977 to oppose bilingualism, convinced 25,000 Anglophones in Sault Saint Marie that it might. As a result, on 29 January 1990, the City Council there passed a resolution declaring English as the sole working language of the local government, “thereby demonstrating the concept of equality for each ethnic, cultural and language group in its jurisdiction.” To examine the complete text of the resolution, see: Monica Heller, *Crosswords: Language, Education, and Ethnicity in French Ontario* (New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1994), 79. Eventually, an Ontario provincial court struck down the resolution in 1994 for reaching beyond the powers of the Sault Saint Marie City Council.

⁴¹ The Canadian parliament and every provincial legislature except Manitoba and Newfoundland had ratified the Meech Lake Accord before the 23 June 1990 deadline. Nevertheless, constitutional amendments in Canada required unanimous provincial support. Some of the potential ramifications of the Accord’s demise became apparent the following day, when upwards of 500,000 people filled the streets of Québec’s capital on Saint Jean Baptiste Day, with many calling for the separation and independence of the province of Québec from the rest of Canada. Paul Cauchon, “200 000 Québécois dans la rue: Une manifestation de solidarité nationale jamais vue,” *Le Devoir*, 26 June 1990.

⁴² To view the lyrics for The Tragically Hip’s “Born In The Water,” see Appendix 4.2.

can't deny that stuff; people can hear and see it. You have to be honest with yourself."⁴³

Baker understood sonic authenticity as the candid expression of self in song. The ensemble's sense of place, as such, reflected its perspective as a group of five twenty-something, exceptionally able-bodied, middle-class, White, heterosexual, anglophone men from Kingston.

The Tragically Hip released "Little Bones" as the first single from *Road Apples* in February 1991. Galvanized by the memorable interplay of Rob Baker and Paul Langlois, the tune further cemented the band's reputation for propulsive, electric guitar-driven roots rock. "Little Bones" opened with a bouncy, reverberating rhythm guitar line, plucked by Langlois, for a couple of bars before the rest of the group jumped in. Johnny Fay laid down a rapid, pounding backbeat on the drums. Gord Sinclair accentuated the track's rhythm and guided its harmony with his thundering bass. Meanwhile, Baker's lead guitar work thickened the simple bluesy chord progression and added melodic fills. With the groove well established, Gordon Downie started belting out potent lyrics that he crafted to fit the music. His vocals quavered with a restrained intensity that he let loose at opportune moments. "Little Bones" did not tell a traditional story. Instead, it offered an enigmatic portrait of a world weary of itself. Downie wove a recurrent phrase in each verse to fervently express the shadings of tavern billiards, nostalgic dread, and visceral reality.⁴⁴ His lyrics mirrored the Southern Ontario Gothic literary style: they depicted the small details of everyday life while disclosing the terror that lurked underneath.⁴⁵ For

⁴³ Harrison, "Tragically Hip Has No Identity Problem."

⁴⁴ To view the lyrics for The Tragically Hip's "Little Bones," see Appendix 4.3.

⁴⁵ Allan Hepburn and Michael Hurley, "Southern Ontario Gothic," in *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature*, ed. William Toye and Eugene Benson, 2nd ed (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1997), 1085. Incidentally, Toronto author Timothy Findley's *The Last of the Crazy People* (1967), one of the first novels labelled Southern Ontario Gothic, featured a cat named Little Bones.

example, the cautious central refrain of the song – “Baby, eat this chicken slow/It’s full of all them little bones” – reminded listeners of the potential danger of consuming poultry hastily, highlighting the bizarreness underlying common day-to-day activities.⁴⁶ Be that as it may, “Little Bones” fared well as a single in Canada during the spring of 1991, peaking at number eleven on the *RPM* 100 Hit Tracks chart early that May.⁴⁷

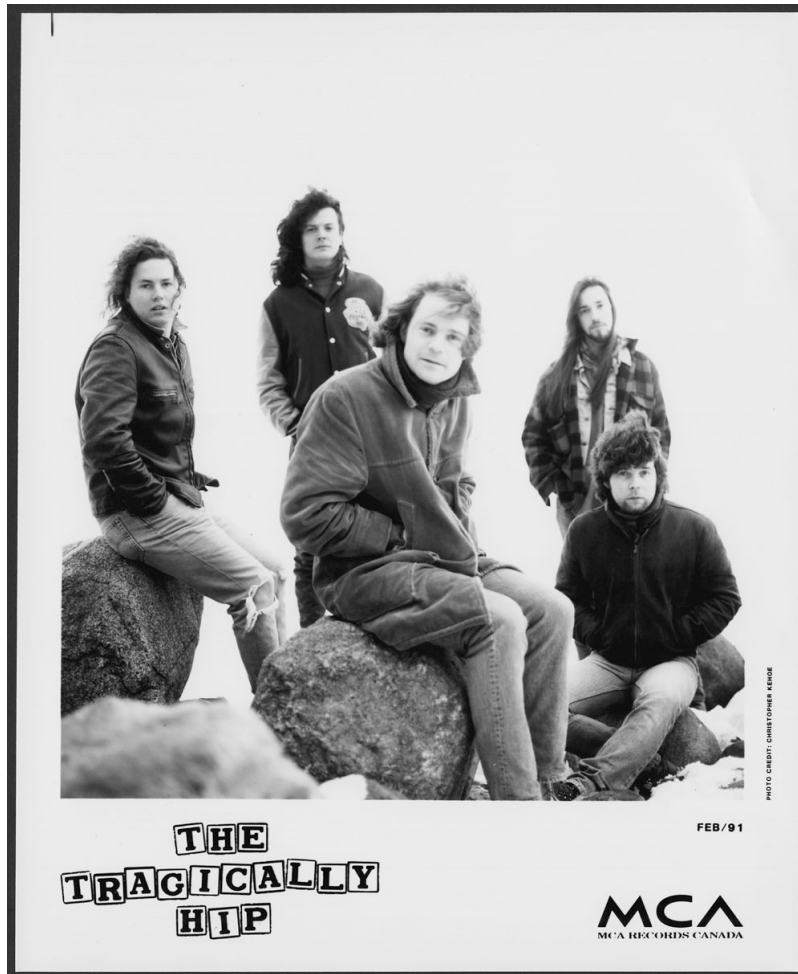


Image 4.2: The Tragically Hip promotional photograph from 1991.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Gordon Downie later revealed that the central refrain of “Little Bones” came from a conversation about chicken he had with a cabbie in New Orleans, Louisiana. Peter Howell, “Vanity Fare,” *The Toronto Star - Starweek*, 10 October 1992, sec. Entertainment.

⁴⁷ “RPM - Library and Archives Canada,” accessed 3 June 2016, <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/rpm>.

⁴⁸ “The Tragically Hip.” MCA Records Canada Publicity Photograph. Canada: MCA Records Canada, 1991. Library and Archives Canada, *RPM fonds*. <http://collectionscanada.gc.ca> (accessed 14 January 2017). In this photograph, from left to right, appear Johnny Fay, Paul Langlois, Gordon Downie, Rob Baker, and Gord Sinclair.

The Tragically Hip advertised its current visual identity through an accompanying music video for “Little Bones.” The commercial packaged the group as a formidable rock act. Most of the video comprised a series of black and white shots from numerous angles that captured the group performing the song live on stage in front of a jam-packed club. Of course, viewers heard the studio version of the song while these concert clips aired. A portion of the screen time also presented close up shots of Gordon Downie lip syncing the vocal lines while completely submerged in a vat of milk with only his face sticking out above the surface. In addition, the extended advertisement included a number of titillating scenes that featured a young, scantily clad, pale-skinned, heterosexual couple tenderly caressing each other in bed, pretending to make love, and, later on, passionately arguing. The video concluded with a forty-five second colour negative clip of Rob Baker feigning a performance of the sweeping electric guitar solo that closed “Little Bones.” He did so while standing on the back of a moving vehicle; the triumphal arch gateway at Toronto’s Exhibition Place receding in the background. In the concert footage dispersed throughout the video, The Tragically Hip looked like a typical bunch of blue-collar workers or college students from early 1990s Canada. They all had naturally styled shoulder-length hair and dressed in blue-collar T-shirt and jean outfits. The Kingston quintet appeared more focused on making roots rock music than tending to its visual identity.

Canadian music journalists generally believed The Tragically Hip did not have a discernable image.⁴⁹ The group cheerfully agreed. “That we have a non-image I take as a compliment,” Gordon Downie revealed. “It’s nothing deliberate,” added Paul Langlois.

⁴⁹ Music journalist Kerry Doole differed with his peers on this matter. He argued that The Tragically Hip featured “real personality, intelligence and wit.” Doole, “A Road Apple A Day.”

“It wasn’t one of a number of options we tried out and said, ‘OK, let’s go with a non-image.’ It’s just the way this band is,” explained Downie.⁵⁰ The lead singer understood The Tragically Hip’s visual identity in essential form: embodied authenticity rested on the unmediated expression of self. The Kingston quintet understood its non-image as genuine because it materialized unintentionally. Yet, this non-image, however inadvertent it may have been, still constituted a kind of visual identity. In Canada, at the start of the 1990s, American glam rock groups commanded the airwaves and sales charts. The Tragically Hip looked positively mundane in comparison to the signature long teased hair, copious cosmetics, gaudy clothing, and ostentatious accessories of glam rockers. And that formed the point. The band lamented the extraordinary influence music video had on rock culture and questioned the purpose of the medium. Rob Baker elaborated:

We’ve done a few of them now and our problem with video is that it doesn’t really have anything to do with music, you know. It’s haircuts and advertising and sexual titillation – it’s really just incidental music to a three-minute piece of film, unless you’re going to make a really interesting film. We’ve only done one for the *Road Apples* record (the single “Little Bones”) and I doubt if we’ll do another one. We’re all a little disillusioned with it.⁵¹

The Tragically Hip felt music video reduced rock to fashion styles, sales promotion, and visual stimulation. Understandings of embodied authenticity obviously coloured Baker’s complaint. Nevertheless, for better or worse, video remained an indispensable part of sound recording marketing in the early 1990s.

The discourse of communal authenticity imagined “the road” in Canada as a rough terrain that forged real rock bands. The rigours and austerity of the van and motel

⁵⁰ Stoute, “Forceful Yet Faceless.”

⁵¹ Roger Levesque, “Teenage Dream Comes True at Last; Tragically Hip Proving It Takes Blood, Sweat and Tears to Become a Hit,” *The Edmonton Journal*, 26 July 1991, sec. Entertainment.

routine in such a vast country could make or break a group. The Tragically Hip survived and thrived on tour because of a lasting camaraderie and sheer persistence. “We function best as friends and as a working team when we’re on the road,” Rob Baker insisted. “We’re now relatively seasoned and we do it well.”⁵² Touring had become a full-time occupation for the Kingston quintet. During the spring of 1991, to support the release of *Road Apples*, the band played dozens of strategic shows across the United States and Europe. That May, The Tragically Hip held a press conference in Toronto to formally announce its six-week Canadian summer tour. Fans from coast to coast eagerly anticipated these live performances. Despite amassing enough popularity to fill hockey arenas across Canada, the group decided to avoid playing them for a couple of important reasons. “It’s hard to sound good and it gets increasingly hard to bridge the gap between the audience and the stage which I think is pretty integral to what we do,” Baker made clear.⁵³ To facilitate collective communication at its shows, The Tragically Hip decided to book multiple dates, as need be, at smaller, more intimate venues in each city on the tour. The strategy seemed to have paid off.

Canadian music journalists, with one exception, raved about The Tragically Hip’s summer concerts.⁵⁴ “It was a great show by what is indisputably Canada’s top rock band,” Lynn Saxberg declared, after catching the ensemble live in Ottawa, Ontario.⁵⁵ Critics ascribed communal authenticity to the group’s performances based on the

⁵² Doole, “A Road Apple A Day.”

⁵³ Lynn Saxberg, “Hip Headlines Canada Day Grandstand; Ottawa Concert Kicks off Tour,” *The Ottawa Citizen*, 27 June 1991, sec. City Lights.

⁵⁴ During the *Road Apples* press cycle, which lasted from January 1991 to January 1992, Canadian music journalists published twelve concert reviews of The Tragically Hip. Only one critic voiced disappointment in the band’s live performance: Paul Delean, “Tragically Hip Lack Intensity,” *The Gazette*, 8 August 1991, sec. Entertainment.

⁵⁵ Lynn Saxberg, “Tragically Hip Blow Rowdy Fans Away,” *The Ottawa Citizen*, 16 August 1991, sec. Entertainment.

demonstration of musical skills and stage presence as well as the composition and reactions of the audience gathered for each gig. They often noted how the deceptively simple dual electric guitar work of Paul Langlois and Rob Baker powered The Tragically Hip's gritty roots rock sound. Lead singer and enigmatic frontman Gordon Downie, once again, constituted the central focus of every concert review. Downie's signature vocals and complex lyrics made each show a memorable experience, but his captivating antics garnered the lion's share of attention from music journalists. Kelly Doole described Downie on stage in the following manner:

Eyes a-buggin', matted hair a-flailin', sweating like a marathon runner with a hangover, he seems to enter some kind of manic trance, exorcising unknown demons by sparring with the mike stand or thrashing around on the floor. This isn't the pre-programmed choreography of some strutting, peacock-rock poseur, but a genuinely riveting, almost disturbing spectacle.⁵⁶

Doole took the apparent spontaneity of Downie's movements as a sign of communal authenticity. His lack of affect seemed truthful. Critics also thought that Downie's connective rapport with The Tragically Hip's audiences played a key role in fostering collective communication. Music journalist Greg Barr commented that, thanks in large part to Downie, "No great wall of ego separates this group from its followers."⁵⁷

The Tragically Hip's sold-out summer tour of 1991 cemented the band's reputation in Canada as a must-see rock attraction. Music journalists observed that ticket holders encompassed primarily college-aged White suburban men who wanted to party and let out some pent-up energy.⁵⁸ Critics, at most, only hinted at the presence of women

⁵⁶ Doole, "A Road Apple A Day."

⁵⁷ Greg Barr, "The Hip's Lead Vocalist Explodes the Rock-Star Myth," *The Ottawa Citizen*, 15 August 1991, sec. City Lights.

⁵⁸ Critic James Muretich offered one of the most detailed descriptions of the crowd at a show by The Tragically Hip during the summer of 1991. See: James Muretich, "Crowd Flips for Tragically Hip," *Calgary Herald*, 25 July 1991, sec. Entertainment.

fans,⁵⁹ suggesting that their numbers remained low enough to deem commentary unnecessary. During a typical show, thousands of sweaty audience members thrashed and danced, their bodies crushing up against each other at the front of the stage. Alcohol-fuelled brawls erupted occasionally. Music journalists described these concerts as frenzied, exhilarating experiences. “It’s a mania built from the ground up, a mania seldom seen in clubs,” James Muretich pointed out. “You gotta wonder if their fans have ever heard real rock before but, what the heck, The Hip play it down ‘n’ dirty and deliver the goods.”⁶⁰ Collective communication flowed between The Tragically Hip and those in the crowd, prompting critics such as Muretich to ascribe communal authenticity to the band’s shows.

The Tragically Hip’s *Road Apples* leaped off Canadian record store shelves, selling over 100,000 copies in the first ten days of release.⁶¹ It reached double platinum sales by July 1991 and triple platinum status just six months later.⁶² *Road Apples* became the third most purchased album of 1991 in Canada: an unprecedented commercial accomplishment for a domestic sound recording act.⁶³ Given such soaring popularity, The Tragically Hip could have easily raised the cost of admission to its summer concert series. Instead, though, the band insisted on reducing and standardizing ticket prices at twenty dollars: all taxes, service charges, and assorted other fees included. The Kingston

⁵⁹ Lynn Saxberg, for instance, recounted how (presumably female) fans threw bras on to the stage at The Tragically Hip performance in Ottawa in August 1991. Saxberg, “Tragically Hip Blow Rowdy Fans Away.”

⁶⁰ Muretich, “Crowd Flips for Tragically Hip.”

⁶¹ Sid Adilman, “Tory Numbers Guru a Rock Fan and Film Buff,” *The Toronto Star*, 31 August 1991, sec. Entertainment.

⁶² “Gold/Platinum,” *Music Canada*, accessed 2 May 2016, <http://musiccanada.com/gold-platinum>.

⁶³ Previously, Alannah Myles (1990), Bryan Adams (1985), and Bachman-Turner Overdrive (1974) had each once reached number four on the *RPM* Top 100 Albums of the year chart. “RPM - Library and Archives Canada,” accessed 2 March 2017, <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/rpm>.

quintet aimed to bring ticket prices more in line with the flattened wallets of recession-hit rock music fans in Canada. “The response was counted in country-wide sell-outs,” music journalist Stephen Ostick noted, “but the goodwill the gesture garnered can’t be measured.”⁶⁴ This unique marketing move indicated that The Tragically Hip made rock music for more than just the love of money. The band possessed folkloric authenticity. Nonetheless, financial imperatives remained. American consumers proved slow to follow Canada’s lead embracing The Tragically Hip’s *Road Apples*. Although the blues-rock ensemble enjoyed pockets of popularity in the United States, a big coast-to-coast breakout down there remained elusive.

I Didn’t Know You Could Kick Like That

Glass Tiger took much longer than expected to record its pivotal third album. The ensemble wanted to head into the studio by mid-autumn 1989 with a veteran record producer who could help the band generate a radio-friendly hard rock sound.⁶⁵ Finding someone to realize Glass Tiger’s creative vision, however, turned into a laborious undertaking. Finally, after several frustrating months, the long search for the right producer ended with American Tom Werman. Everyone in the group approved of him. Werman carried impressive hard rock credentials, having developed numerous hit LPs, including recent chart toppers for Mötley Crüe and Poison. Glass Tiger flew to Los Angeles in the spring of 1990 to begin working with Werman. The City of Angels had become the epicentre of the hard rock community over the previous few years,

⁶⁴ Stephen Ostick, “Tragically Hip a Contender for Title of Fans’ Favorite,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, 17 August 1991, sec. Entertainment.

⁶⁵ Tim Arsenault, “Glass Tiger on ‘Thank-You’ Tour,” *The Chronicle Herald*, 9 August 1989, sec. Entertainment.

galvanized by the international success of Quiet Riot, Mötley Crüe, Ratt, and other heavier local bands.⁶⁶ State-of-the-art recording studios located near the famous Sunset Strip attracted top-notch talent. Glass Tiger relished the opportunity to share space at A&M Studios with two of the world's biggest hard rock acts.⁶⁷ "It was really cool because on one side of us we had Guns N' Roses and on the other side was Bon Jovi," Wayne Parker recalled. "I was never really a big Guns N' Roses fan until I walked by the studio and they were putting the finishing touches on some songs and man, they were just smoking!"⁶⁸ Rubbing shoulders with America's hard-rock elite made for an inspirational recording atmosphere. Production on *Simple Mission* wrapped up in October 1990. Glass Tiger left the mild climes of southern California for Newmarket, Ontario, where the band would have to wait another six months before Capitol Records released the group's third studio effort.

The first single issued from *Simple Mission*, "Animal Heart," perfectly encapsulated Glass Tiger's new hard rock tone. Set in motion by a blaring heavily distorted electric guitar riff, "Animal Heart" quickly established that the band had a completely different sound. The guest performance of professional drummer Tony Thompson added to Glass Tiger's sonic metamorphosis on this track. "Animal Heart" displayed a hedonistic lyrical style that matched the coarseness of the cranked-up electric guitar.⁶⁹ Alan Frew's taut vocal melodies relayed the carnal longing of a young straight male protagonist. He presented his aggressive lustful pleas to a particular woman as

⁶⁶ Robert Walser, *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music*, Music/culture (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1993), 12.

⁶⁷ Glass Tiger recorded with Werman at Sunset Sound and The Sound Factory studios in Los Angeles as well. Roy Windhager, "Glass Tiger Project Has Sheer Animal Magnetism," *RPM (Weekly)*, 6 April 1991.

⁶⁸ Mitch Joel, "Glass Tiger: Mission Accomplished," *Fan Club*, June 1991.

⁶⁹ To view the lyrics for Glass Tiger's "Animal Heart," see Appendix 4.4.

innate, animalistic bodily urges. Highly processed, thickly layered background vocals delivered by sessional singers during the chorus sections reinforced this essentialist understanding of predatory sexuality. Glass Tiger's "Animal Heart," with its Mötley-Crüe-styled vivid electric guitar riffs and brightly polished backup harmonies in the manner of Def Leppard, showcased several sonic markers of top-selling hard rock bands from the early 1990s. The single became a fairly big hit in Canada for the Newmarket outfit. "Animal Heart" spent fifteen weeks on the *RPM* 100 Hit Tracks chart, peaking at number four in late May 1991.⁷⁰

Glass Tiger launched a whirlwind mass-media blitz to support the release of *Simple Mission*. The band developed a narrative to explain its new hard-rock sound to sceptical Canadian music journalists. Alan Frew articulated the justification wonderfully:

The conscious effort to make it a harder sound was the fact that the last two albums of our touring life got us labelled as a pop band. We'd go and perform live and people would come up to us, especially the males, and say, 'You guys are really a rock and roll band. I didn't know you could kick like that; I thought you were a pop band.' We started getting a little tired of that because in the early days we were one of the toughest little bar bands going. We did everything from AC/DC to Scorpions. Our roots are in rock 'n' roll so we thought that the best way to get back to that was to write songs that made the guitar the dominant instrument over the keyboards and to find a producer that deals in rock and roll, no offence to Jim Vallance. So over that two-year period we wrote songs with the guitar out front and found Tom Werman as a producer.⁷¹

Glass Tiger recited this narrative repeatedly during the *Simple Mission* press junket, though the singer's rendition of it here proved particularly well-rounded.⁷² Frew voiced

⁷⁰ "RPM - Library and Archives Canada," accessed 5 May 2015, <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/rpm>.

⁷¹ Martin Melhuish, "Alan Frew and the Glass Tiger Tale," *The Record*, 29 April 1991.

⁷² Glass Tiger recounted versions of this narrative in several articles: Brent Kawchuk, "Band Puts Boots to Audience," *Calgary Herald*, 27 March 1991, sec. Entertainment; Greg Barr, "Glass Tiger Back with New, Sharper Image," *The Ottawa Citizen*, 30 March 1991, sec. Entertainment; Keith Sharp, "Keeping It Simple," *Music Express*, April 1991; Roy Windhager, "Glass Tiger Project Has Sheer Animal Magnetism," *RPM (Weekly)*, 6 April 1991; Stephen Ostick, "Glass Tiger Prowls Netherworld: Saggin Sales Put Rock

frustration at having been stuck with a pop label. He said group members responded by reviving the band's sturdier musical roots and distinguishing themselves as real rockers. The recovery of manliness formed the subtext of Frew's tale. Glass Tiger found the pop band characterization terribly emasculating. No wonder Frew singled out male audience members as those who most often recognized the Newmarket group's ability to truly rock. He implied that grown men generated and gauged the sound of rock music best. The most telling aspect of his gendered narrative, however, involved positioning the electric guitar as paramount to the restoration of Glass Tiger. "The electric guitar, as situated within the masculinist discourse of rock, is virtually seen as an extension of the male body," music sociologist Mavis Bayton discovered.⁷³ Given that the guitar functioned as an electronic appendage intimately linked to the establishment of manhood, Glass Tiger's deliberate foregrounding of the instrument in its music clearly served the recovery of manliness. Frew's explanation of the group's hard rock turn constituted a bid for sonic authenticity fundamentally rooted in the negotiation and construction of masculine identities. Whether this gendered rhetorical gambit actually convinced critics remained to be seen.

Simple Mission received considerably muted music press coverage in Canada. Glass Tiger may have been out of the spotlight for too long to warrant sweeping attention. Still, a few critics published record reviews in newspapers across the country

Career on the Line," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 8 April 1991, sec. Entertainment; and Mitch Joel, "Glass Tiger: Mission Accomplie," *Fan club*, June 1991.

⁷³ Mavis Bayton, "Women and the Electric Guitar," in *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender*, ed. Sheila Whiteley (New York: Routledge, 1997), 43. For an instructive look at the link between the electric guitar and American heterosexuality in the late twentieth century, see: Steve Waksman, *Instruments of Desire: The Electric Guitar and the Shaping of Musical Experience* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

during the early spring of 1991, and a majority of them expressed approval.⁷⁴ Most music journalists welcomed Glass Tiger's change in musical direction. Categorization remained the primary task of the discourse of sonic authenticity. "There are a handful of superior rock numbers here, including the ballsy hit single, 'Animal Heart,'" Craig MacInnis noted.⁷⁵ Ironically, after equating rock excellence with male genitalia, MacInnis proceeded to denounce Glass Tiger's misogynist lyrics on the tracks "One Night Alone" and "(She Said) Love Me Like A Man."⁷⁶ Such explicit chauvinism struck MacInnis as rather dated. Moreover, despite all the hype promoting the ensemble's new hard-rock sound, critics recognized that almost half of the tracks on *Simple Mission* actually constituted radio-ready pop ballads. For some music journalists, not only did these lighter pieces demonstrate creative breadth, they continued to represent Glass Tiger's strongpoint. A couple of reviewers could not have disagreed more. They believed that these pop tracks prevented *Simple Mission* from achieving legitimate rock album status. Once again, the Canadian music press debated whether the Newmarket group actually sounded like a real rock band.

⁷⁴ Three of the six reviews for Glass Tiger's *Simple Mission* struck a positive tone: Stephen Cooke, "Thursday Tunes," *The Chronicle Herald*, 4 April 1991, sec. Entertainment; Michel Bilodeau, "Après une absence de 3 ans, le groupe Glass Tiger fait un retour en force," *Le Soleil*, 13 April 1991, sec. Le rock; and Yvan Brunet, "Les disques Populaires," *L'Acadie Nouvelle*, 16 April 1991, sec. Arts & spectacles. Two of the reviews appeared mixed: Stephen Ostick, "Glass Tiger Chases Serious Status," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 30 March 1991, sec. Entertainment and Craig MacInnis, "McTiger Bellyaches into the '90s," *The Toronto Star*, 6 April 1991, sec. Entertainment. And one review proved largely negative: Helen Metella, "Stones' Steel Wheels Disc an Unimaginative Effort," *The Edmonton Journal*, 21 April 1991, sec. Entertainment.

⁷⁵ MacInnis, "McTiger Bellyaches into the '90s."

⁷⁶ To view the lyrics to Glass Tiger's "One Night Alone" and "(She Said) Love Me Like A Man," see Appendices 4.5 and 4.6 respectively.

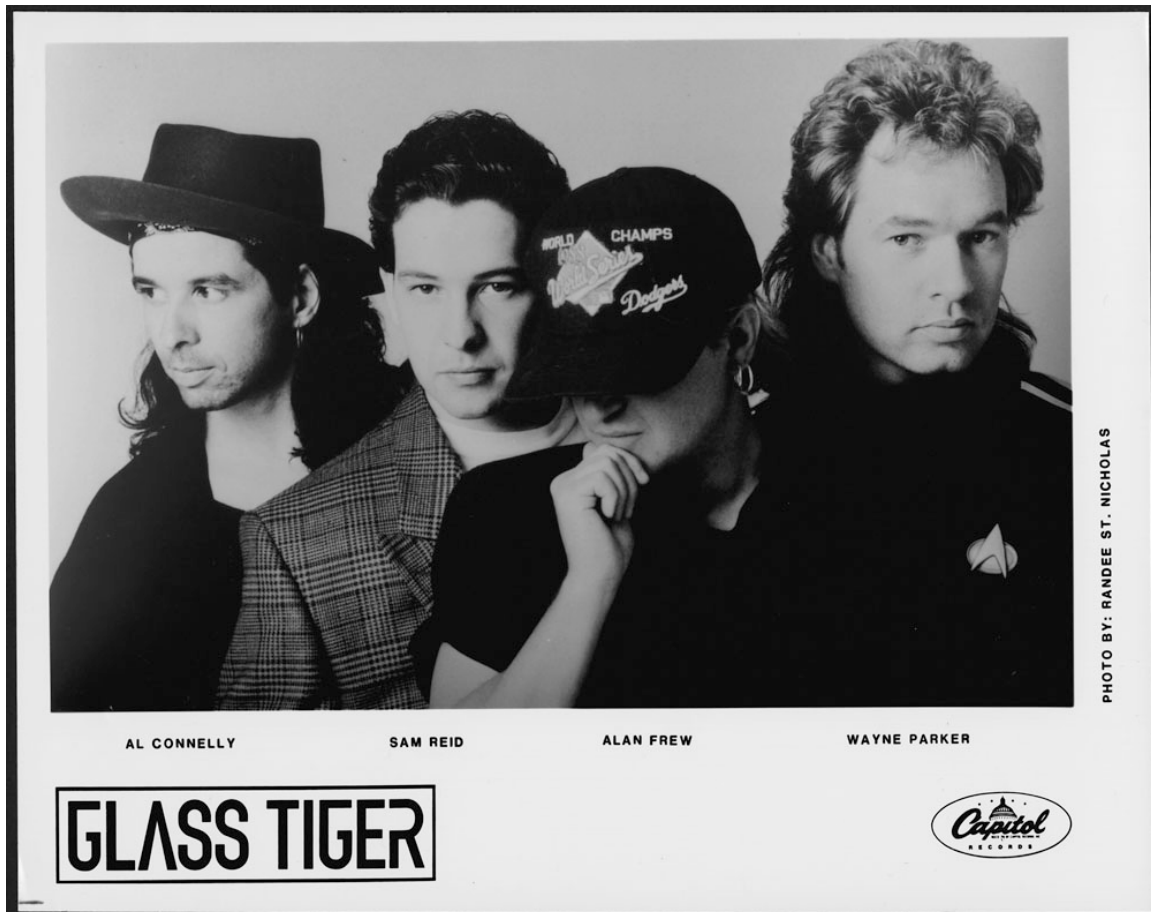


Image 4.3: Glass Tiger promotional photograph from 1991.⁷⁷

Glass Tiger established a new visual identity to mirror its hard rock sound on *Simple Mission* through the music video for “Animal Heart.” The four-minute commercial began with a slow motion wide shot of an eagle soaring above the sun-drenched Los Angeles cityscape, gliding through the smoggy air toward the stationary camera while the track’s opening electric guitar riff burst forth. The rest of the video transpired in two diverse locations: a darkened sound stage where Glass Tiger went through the motions of playing “Animal Heart” under a handful of spotlights; and a sunny, dusty urban laneway in which a Siberian tiger and a young, scantily clad, woman model paraded for the camera, though never at the same time. The tiger sequences

⁷⁷ “Glass Tiger.” Capitol Records Publicity Photograph. Canada: Capitol Records, 1991. Library and Archives Canada, *RPM fonds*. <http://collectionscanada.gc.ca> (accessed 14 January 2017).

offered a visual representation of the ferociously powerful animalistic urges at the core of the tune. Several shots featuring that alluring woman walking around served to present her as the object of male heterosexual desire from “Animal Heart.” Glass Tiger, meanwhile, feigned an energetic performance of the song. Everyone in the band, including new interim drummer Randall Coryell, wore faded blue jeans matched with either silky pastiche dress shirts or a T-shirt and black leather jacket; prototypical mainstream hard rock uniforms from the early 1990s. Group members also donned classic big hairdos, except for Alan Frew, who sported a shorter New-Kids-On-The-Block-type cut. Taken as a whole, in the video for “Animal Heart,” Glass Tiger put forth a blatant appeal for embodied authenticity. The band strove to look the part of genuine hard rockers in Canada.

The select shows Glass Tiger gave in support of its third LP received poor reviews from Canadian music journalists. During the *Simple Mission* press cycle, which lasted from March 1991 to June 1992, reporters issued only three concert reviews, and each one expressed a feeling of disappointment. Critical attention focused on both the ability of band members and the reactions of ticket holders. If music journalists detected the appearance of collective communication, then they would ascribe communal authenticity to Glass Tiger’s show. The Newmarket group generated tepid critiques. “Shorn of fancy stage duds, flashy lighting and a foolproof sound system,” Helen Metella reported, “Frew and company still boasted the essentials – an adept, friendly and not unintelligent front man singing lilting tunes.”⁷⁸ Not exactly a ringing endorsement from Metella. Glass Tiger and Capitol Records had been trumpeting the band’s new hard-rock

⁷⁸ Helen Metella, “Pillar Upstages Glass Tiger Star,” *The Edmonton Journal*, 10 April 1992, sec. Entertainment.

sound, but, according to critic Bernard Potvin, the most important part of that heavy tone, the electric guitar, did not meet expectations during the ensemble's live performance:

The disappointment of the evening appeared in the form of guitarist Al Connelly who holds the key instrument in the step towards the changing sound of the band. One must treat the guitar like a sword and kill each amplifier with guitar struts. Each chord must be brandished like a cattle prod not like a feather.⁷⁹

Potvin's negative appraisal of Connelly rested on martial and technological metaphors linked to traditional notions of manliness. It conflated the ability to wield an electric guitar with the manifestation of masculine gender norms, articulating a long-standing tenet of rock ideology.⁸⁰ For Potvin, Connelly's failure to handle the electric guitar correctly inhibited collective communication, preventing the music journalist from ascribing communal authenticity to Glass Tiger's concert. Furthermore, critics noted that the band played for much smaller crowds than before, though slightly more diverse in age, class, and gender. Poor ticket sales resulted from more than just a weak economy. Most people in Canada had simply lost interest in the once-promising Newmarket group. "The Tiger's best days are clearly behind them, and you didn't need to see the rows of empty seats, left by hundreds who hadn't bothered staying for trademark hit 'Don't Forget Me,' to know it," Stephen Ostick concluded.⁸¹ Audience members leaving the show prematurely strongly signalled to Ostick that communal authenticity had not materialized.

⁷⁹ Bernard Potvin, "Glass Tiger Wins Roar of Approval," *The Ottawa Citizen*, 3 December 1991, sec. Entertainment.

⁸⁰ Gender scholar Mavis Bayton argued: "For a man, a good performance on the electric guitar is simultaneously a good 'performance' of 'masculinity.' The 'heavier' the rock the more true that is." Bayton, "Women and the Electric Guitar," 43.

⁸¹ Stephen Ostick, "Canada's Top Pop Rockers Crank out Same Old Roar despite New-Sound Hype," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 24 June 1991, sec. Entertainment.

Glass Tiger knew that *Simple Mission* would determine the band's future as recording artists. "Album number three is the turning point," Alan Frew acknowledged. "This is where Joe Public and the media turn to you and say, 'Ok. You're in! You've survived. You get to stay now for five or ten years and we'll stay with you.' Or you're gone."⁸² *The Thin Red Line*, the best-selling debut album in Canadian sound recording history, established the Newmarket quintet. Band members, music journalists, and industry professionals viewed *Diamond Sun* as a huge commercial letdown, despite its moderate success in Canada. Unfortunately for Glass Tiger, dwindling sales continued with *Simple Mission*. The ensemble's third LP reached platinum status in Canada at the end of May 1991, just nine weeks into its release, though consumer interest waned shortly thereafter.⁸³ Even with significant marketing promotion, receptive critical reviews, and considerable radio support, Canadian listeners chose not to embrace *Simple Mission* as ardently as Frew had hoped. The Newmarket outfit's new hard-rock sound did not appeal to the band's core "little girl audience," which now appeared enamoured with the hottest teen sensation: New Kids On The Block. Neither could Glass Tiger's current tough tone compete with proven hard rockers like Metallica, Guns N' Roses, and AC/DC, whose latest albums topped the Canadian charts in 1991. The group fell off the public radar in the summer of 1992 and quietly folded. A remarkable run came to an inconspicuous end.

⁸² Melhuish, "Alan Frew and the Glass Tiger Tale."

⁸³ "Gold/Platinum," *Music Canada*, accessed 23 May 2015, <http://musiccanada.com/gold-platinum>.

The Yellow Tape

On 29 August 1988, eighteen-year-olds Ed Robertson and Steven Page, fast friends since Scarborough Music Camp that summer, hatched the idea for Barenaked Ladies during a Bob Dylan show in Toronto. “It was the most boring concert,” Page recalled. “So we amused ourselves by dreaming up this imaginary band that we might have one day. We wanted good songs and good music, but we’d take ourselves a lot less seriously than the music – unlike Bob Dylan.”⁸⁴ Unimpressed with one of the hallowed voices of their parents’ generation, the pair joked about forming an acoustic duo that would wear hip waders and welding goggles, and sing tunes about tomato soup and good brunch. What started out as a hypothetical lark, however, became a veritable reality only weeks later. Robertson had promised to play a fundraiser for a local food bank, but as the day approached the singer-guitarist found himself without accompaniment. In a pinch, Robertson recruited Page, a trained vocalist, and, with just one rehearsal, Barenaked Ladies made its stage debut that October at Nathan Phillips Square as a zany musical comedy twosome. After about a year, frustrated by poor audience reception, the pair abandoned its wholly comedic course and formed an acoustic quartet with brothers Jim and Andy Creeggan on double bass and congas.⁸⁵ The revamped Barenaked Ladies performed a mixture of cover songs and original material, most of which traded heavily in parody. Andy Creeggan left for Uruguay on a university student exchange program in the spring of 1990, leading Robertson and Page to hire drummer Tyler Stewart in his

⁸⁴ John Doyle, “Goofiness Is Its Own Reward for Boys from the ‘Burbs,” *The Globe and Mail*, 10 August 1991, sec. Entertainment.

⁸⁵ Craig MacInnis, “Troupes Yuk It up for a Good Cause,” *The Toronto Star*, 11 December 1990, sec. Entertainment.

stead. When Andy Creeggan rejoined Barenaked Ladies in April 1991, he shifted from percussion to keyboards as the young suburban quintet rounded out its unusual sound.

By the end of 1991, Barenaked Ladies had become tremendously popular in alternative music circles throughout southern Ontario, largely based on the strength of its eponymous cassette, generally known as *The Yellow Tape*. Recorded overnight at Wellesley Sound Studios in Toronto with the assistance of engineer Walter Sobczak, the self-produced five-song EP proved a trendy commodity at gigs, upon its independent release that July. Paul Routhier, the alternative buyer for HMV's downtown Toronto superstore, sensed something big brewing. He tracked down copies of *The Yellow Tape* to stock the racks at his record store and watched in amazement as sales snowballed. "It had built up to a couple hundred a week; then at Christmas it was 500 a week," Routhier recalled, in early 1992. "We're still selling 30 or 40 a week. It's insane."⁸⁶ Barenaked Ladies defied the conventional wisdom of the sound recording industry in Canada. The band's self-distributed EP became the first independent product to land on *The Record's* national chart. Nevertheless, despite such remarkable commercial success, few Canadian music journalists reviewed *The Yellow Tape*. Critics who did struggled to categorize the sounds on the independent cassette in terms of the discourse of sonic authenticity. "Too profound to be pegged as a novelty act, yet too fun and frivolous to be considered a 'serious' rock band, the acoustic quintet occupies an un-definable middle ground," declared Roch Parisien.⁸⁷ The comedic pieces on *The Yellow Tape* transgressed conventional rock boundaries, making them hard to characterize. Nonetheless, the group offered its own interpretation of that enigmatic "middle ground."

⁸⁶ Dave Bookman, "Exposed!," *The Canadian Composer*, Spring 1992.

⁸⁷ Roch Parisien, "Weekend Best Bets," *The Ottawa Citizen*, 19 September 1991, sec. City Lights.

Barenaked Ladies thought the term “acoustic hip-hop” best described its unique brand of musical material. “Hip-hop takes tape samples from other songs and incorporates them into the music,” Steven Page explained. “We simply throw in bits and pieces from other songs into our own materials without using tapes, synthesizers or anything electric. It’s just us.”⁸⁸ By incorporating musical styles as diverse as bluegrass, jazz, folk, pop, country, and rap, Barenaked Ladies manifested a low-tech type of postmodern pastiche on *The Yellow Tape*. Having a truncated version of Public Enemy’s “Fight the Power” on the indie cassette made the band’s connection to hip-hop even more explicit. The politically charged American rap song from 1989 reacted to the displacement, fragmentation, and reintegration of Black culture in the United States. The pale cover delivered by Barenaked Ladies, however, entered parodic territory when it revised the lyrics for the controversial third verse of “Fight the Power,” stripping the indictment of anti-Black racism from the original track.⁸⁹ In so doing, the acoustic outfit added to the rather long history of White appropriation, commodification, and dilution of African American artistic expressions. Barenaked Ladies begged to differ. “We’re all big hip-hop fans,” Page made clear. “I’ve had it with people who think, ‘We’re square white people, so we’ll make fun of rap because we don’t understand it.’ Maybe we can help bridge some gap, because there’s still some kind of stigma attached to hip-hop for some people.”⁹⁰ It made sense that band members admired rap music. By the early 1990s, Toronto had become the focal point in Canada for the burgeoning urban art form.⁹¹ And

⁸⁸ Doyle, “Goofiness Is Its Own Reward for Boys from the ‘Burbs.”

⁸⁹ To view a comparison of the lyrics for the two versions of the third verse, see Appendix 4.7.

⁹⁰ Mark Lepage, “Barenaked Ladies: Their Music Appeals to the Geek in All of Us,” *The Gazette*, 5 December 1991, sec. Entertainment.

⁹¹ Francesca D’Amico, “‘The Mic Is My Piece’: Canadian Rap, the Gendered ‘Cool Pose,’ and Music Industry Racialization and Regulation,” *Journal of the Canadian History Association* 26, no. 1 (2015): 263.

young White suburbanites counted among the most powerful consumers of hip-hop music at the time.⁹² Nevertheless, listening to rap records did not necessarily equate comprehension of the particular cultures that produced them. As historian Francesca D'Amico pointed out, Black Canadians initially used rap music to confront their exclusion and erasure from the discourse about national identity.⁹³ Barenaked Ladies may have intended to “help bridge some gap” with its rendition of Public Enemy’s “Fight the Power.” Yet, by altering and mitigating the call for social justice undergirding the song, all in the service of humour, the group’s attempt to de-stigmatize hip-hop music actually minimized the ensemble’s association with Blackness while nullifying the cultural meaning “Fight the Power” provided for Black communities in Canada.⁹⁴

Barenaked Ladies chose “Be My Yoko Ono” as the first single from *The Yellow Tape*. Steven Page created the piece in 1989 and Ed Robertson filled it out. The band recorded this specific version of the song in the spring of 1990, before Tyler Stewart joined the group, for CFNY’s *Modern Music*, a yearly sampler compilation issued by Toronto’s leading alternative radio station. Robertson’s bouncy, dulcet acoustic guitar lines drove “Be My Yoko Ono,” though not without help from the lively plucking of Jim Creeggan on his custom-made, stand-up bass and Andy Creeggan’s bubbly conga beat. Well arranged, tight, four-part vocal harmonies also contributed greatly to the overall movement and sound of the satirical tune. Page belted out the lead melody of the jocular love song with aplomb. The lyrics for “Be My Yoko Ono” featured a tender, shy entreaty

⁹² Russell A. Potter, *Spectacular Vernaculars: Hip-Hop and the Politics of Postmodernism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 10.

⁹³ D'Amico, “‘The Mic Is My Piece’: Canadian Rap, the Gendered ‘Cool Pose,’ and Music Industry Racialization and Regulation,” 258.

⁹⁴ Perry A. Hall, “African-American Music: Dynamics of Appropriation and Innovation,” in *Borrowed Power: Essays on Cultural Appropriation*, ed. Bruce H. Ziff and Pratima V. Rao (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 31–51.

to a potential girlfriend, couched in terms of a self-deprecating comparison to John Lennon of the Beatles.⁹⁵ With “Be My Yoko Ono,” and most of the other tunes on *The Yellow Tape*, Barenaked Ladies referenced pop-culture icons as a way for listeners to gain self-reflection. “Pop culture has always been important in my life,” Page revealed. “It told me what I wanted to be like and what I didn’t want. It shaped the way I looked at the outside world. Especially with a younger audience, I think it’s really important that they dissect what they know about it. People don’t think about this enough.”⁹⁶ The suburban Toronto group channelled the spirit of the postwar American and British pop art movement through songs like “Be My Yoko Ono.” The effervescent track, which became a huge alternative radio hit in the Golden Horseshoe during late 1991,⁹⁷ tried to merge supposedly superficial pop culture with purportedly serious art.

⁹⁵ To view the lyrics for “Be My Yoko Ono” by Barenaked Ladies, see Appendix 4.8.

⁹⁶ Helen Metella, “Barenaked Ladies out in the Open; Satirists from the Suburbs Began Pop Career Just Horsing around at Parties,” *The Edmonton Journal*, 31 October 1991, sec. Entertainment.

⁹⁷ “Naked Ladies Fun, Lucky, Popular,” *The Chronicle Herald*, 9 December 1991, sec. Entertainment.



Image 4.4: Barenaked Ladies promotional photograph from 1991.⁹⁸

Barenaked Ladies established its image primarily through music video. In late March 1991, with time to kill between sound check and a show, the independent band piled into CITY-TV's Speaker's Corner in downtown Toronto.⁹⁹ For a dollar, anyone could enter the four-foot by three-foot booth and have a 90-second message video taped. The local television station aired the most entertaining clips each week. Speaker's Corner

⁹⁸ "Barenaked Ladies." Barenaked Ladies promotional photograph courtesy of bbchron.blogspot.ca. In the photograph, from left to right, appear Jim Creeggan, Steven Page, Ed Robertson, and Tyler Stewart.

⁹⁹ Lynn Saxberg, "The Barenaked Ladies: If the Name Fits, Wear It," *The Ottawa Citizen*, 12 April 1991, sec. Now! Recall that, at this juncture, Andy Creeggan had not yet re-joined Barenaked Ladies.

enabled Barenaked Ladies to produce a video for “Be My Yoko Ono” and gain some exposure on the cheap. The group paid the meagre toll and captured an abbreviated performance of its quirky love song. Steven Page delivered the lead vocals with zeal while seated on a stool, his bespectacled pale face positioned centre frame. Ed Robertson stood to the left in a Siwash sweater. He vigorously played the only instrument, a Takamine acoustic guitar, and occasionally bent over when he sang to enhance his visibility. Tyler Stewart and Jim Creeggan situated themselves behind Page. They provided vocal harmonies and played patty cake with each other to keep the rhythm, displaying a youthful energy in the process. Given the visual limitations and live conditions of Speaker’s Corner, the short video for “Be My Yoko Ono” served to highlight the talented musicianship and spontaneous theatrics of Barenaked Ladies. The engaging, goofy clip received repeated airings on both CITY-TV and, eventually, the nationally broadcast MuchMusic. It turned into a promotional device of great ingenuity.

Slowly but surely, gig by gig, Barenaked Ladies developed a loyal fan base across Canada in 1991. The independent band criss-crossed the country twice that year, giving select shows in nightclubs or university bars from Halifax, Nova Scotia to Victoria, British Columbia. Barenaked Ladies became particularly popular in Toronto, where the quintet had played extensively and enjoyed considerable alternative radio support. The group sold out multiple nights at the Bathurst Street Theatre in August and at the much larger Danforth Music Hall the following November; an amazing accomplishment for an ensemble without any record label support. Few Canadian music journalists penned concert reviews of these live performances by Barenaked Ladies. Most who did hailed from southern Ontario. Critics there found the group’s collective communication

exhilarating. For instance, Peter Schneider, still awash in the euphoria of discovery, recalled: “By the time the Ladies left the stage, I was spent, coming down off a pop culture high, a massive hit of referential humour, original and cover tunes, and oddball perception that set me reeling.”¹⁰⁰ Barenaked Ladies counted Schneider among its many converts. Young, enthusiastic crowds roared with approval at each Toronto gig. Even though the acoustic quintet did not employ a classic rock combo set up or sport dapper stage gear, the handful of music journalists that caught the band live in 1991 eagerly ascribed communal authenticity to the show.¹⁰¹

Barenaked Ladies readjusted its sonic and visual identity during the winter of 1991-1992 with an imaginative rendition of Bruce Cockburn’s “Lovers In A Dangerous Time” and a low-budget companion music video. Steven Page admitted uneasiness toward the band’s growing reputation for creating zany tunes.¹⁰² Barenaked Ladies, therefore, adopted a pretty serious approach for its hushed treatment of Cockburn’s rock hit from 1984. Andy Creeggan supplied soft, ethereal piano touches, while brother Jim used a bow on his double bass to create elegant melodic string lines. Tyler Stewart wielded brush sticks to keep the dynamic rhythm of the track going on the drums. At the same time, Ed Robertson tenderly plucked his acoustic guitar and alternated singing lead vocals with Steven Page. In January 1992, Intrepid Records issued “Lovers In A Dangerous Time” by Barenaked Ladies as a single from *Kick At The Darkness*, a Cockburn tribute album the label compiled. The cover song garnered tremendous airplay

¹⁰⁰ Peter C. Schneider, “Barenaked Ladies,” *Trans FM*, September 1991.

¹⁰¹ Doyle, “Goofiness Is Its Own Reward for Boys from the ‘Burbs”; Schneider, “Barenaked Ladies”; Bill Reynolds, “Every Day a Summer Holiday for Ladies,” *The Globe and Mail*, 30 November 1991, sec. Entertainment; Greg Barr, “Barenaked Ladies Have to Start Taking Their Success Seriously,” *The Ottawa Citizen*, 12 December 1991, sec. City Lights.

¹⁰² Metella, “Barenaked Ladies out in the Open; Satirists from the Suburbs Began Pop Career Just Horsing around at Parties.”

in Canada, peaking at number sixteen on the *RPM* 100 Hit Tracks chart that February.¹⁰³ The group's national profile expanded accordingly. "Lovers In A Dangerous Time" marked a crossroad for Barenaked Ladies. "Musically, we're trying to be a little less slapstick," Robertson made clear. "We realize that now that we have the option to do video, the video can still be fun and vibrant and silly and the music can be a separate entity."¹⁰⁴ Directed by Tim Hamilton and paid for with a grant from the Canada Council of the Arts, the music video for the band's version of "Lovers In A Dangerous Time" celebrated the White suburban roots of Barenaked Ladies. Most of the extended commercial entailed greyscale and colour shots of the quintet pretending to play the song in the back of a pick-up truck as it drove around Scarborough, Ontario on a cold snowy afternoon. The nostalgic ride through the city streets finally led to a mock autograph session at a local A&A record store. Barenaked Ladies wrapped up the video by staging a lively outdoor performance in a nearby field, surrounded by a small crowd of young men and women. The four-minute advertisement solidified the ensemble's peculiar suburban image. It presented band members as proudly unfashionable and socially awkward. Consequently, Barenaked Ladies expressed a bid for embodied authenticity that challenged the hold of metropolitan cultural norms on mainstream rock circles in Canada.¹⁰⁵

In January 1992, Barenaked Ladies became another flashpoint in a burgeoning debate over "political correctness" in Canada, after municipal government officials prohibited the quintet from playing a huge New Year's Eve bash outside Toronto's City Hall. Some public servants took issue with the band's whimsical name. Back in 1989, co-

¹⁰³ "RPM - Library and Archives Canada," accessed 2 June 2016, <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/rpm>.

¹⁰⁴ Chris Gudgeon, "Fortune's Favourite Fools," *Canadian Musician*, April 1992.

¹⁰⁵ Barr, "Barenaked Ladies Have to Start Taking Their Success Seriously."

founder Ed Robertson made clear in an interview that the ensemble intended the moniker to express youthful *naïveté*: “The idea we want to convey is that of a nine-year-old kid playing hide ‘n’ seek and stumbling across an old copy of *Playboy*. He opens it up and ‘Wow!’ he sees his first Bare Naked Lady. It’s a bit tongue-in-cheek, but there’s a charm to it that we really like.”¹⁰⁶ Robertson’s explanation framed women’s bodies in terms perceived and appreciated by heterosexual men. It suggested female vulnerability and passivity, and inferred a social system in which straight men enjoy significant power. Near the end of December 1991, Toronto civic events staff determined that the group’s name objectified women and, therefore, contravened recently passed guidelines for avoiding sexual stereotyping while respecting the dignity and worth of all persons.¹⁰⁷ On those grounds the Protocol Office at City Hall removed the acoustic quintet from the upcoming holiday concert line-up. A couple of weeks later, news of the situation rapidly spread through the Canadian media. Journalists across the country wrote pieces about this latest “politically correct” shocker. By and large, reporters and commentators vehemently opposed the decision to ban Barenaked Ladies because of its name. Their critiques often invoked the anti-feminist rhetoric of American right-wing neoconservatives who had been railing against the alleged scourge of “political correctness” since the late 1980s.¹⁰⁸ Barenaked Ladies found itself in the midst of a coast-to-coast publicity whirlwind and decided to take full advantage of the opportunity, milking all the attention possible.

“Instead of jumping all over [Toronto Mayor] June Rowlands, we let it slide, and the

¹⁰⁶ Mitch Potter, “We Finally Get Date with Barenaked Ladies,” *The Toronto Star*, 24 November 1989, sec. Entertainment.

¹⁰⁷ Peter Howell, “City Hall Still Groping for Barenaked Solution,” *The Toronto Star*, 9 January 1992, sec. Entertainment.

¹⁰⁸ Michele Landsberg, “Barenaked Bungle Exposes Klutzes Groping to Get with It,” *The Toronto Star*, 10 January 1992, sec. Entertainment.

media and the public chastised her enough for us,” Tyler Stewart explained. “And we sold 18,000 tapes in January, bottom line there. It sounds crass, but our name was in every household across the country.”¹⁰⁹

The independent acoustic quintet started to make a rare crossover from the alternative music scene to the mainstream in Canada during early 1992. Thanks to a \$100,000 Discovery-To-Disc Program grant sponsored by Toronto’s CFNY-FM radio station, Barenaked Ladies stood poised to record its first full-length studio LP. The suburban ensemble also entertained pitches from multiple major labels, but held out for a deal that would bring international recognition. “You have to wonder if the band needs a contract,” music critic Peter Howell suggested. “The band’s indie cassette, *Barenaked Ladies*, has sold 42,000 copies to date and it’s currently top of the pops at the HMV Superstore on Yonge Street, selling more copies than albums by Michael Jackson, U2 or Genesis.”¹¹⁰ Howell praised the group for successfully navigating the Canadian sound recording industries on its own, for displaying folkloric authenticity. Barenaked Ladies created a charged atmosphere in the marketplace. Steven Page understood the band had reached an odd juncture: “We’re at a strange stage now in that we’re quite popular, yet still independent and unsigned. And I’m still living with my parents. We’ve been fortunate enough and we’ve worked hard enough to see some things happen.”¹¹¹ By the summer of 1992, the quirky ensemble had sold over 85,000 copies of *The Yellow Tape* in Canada, an unheard-of number for an independent cassette. Barenaked Ladies appeared on the verge of superstardom.

¹⁰⁹ Mick Gzowski, “Banning in Toronto Gives Barenaked Ladies Some Exposure,” *The Vancouver Sun*, 27 August 1992, sec. Features.

¹¹⁰ Peter Howell, “Ladies Don’t Have Record Deal yet,” *The Toronto Star*, 7 February 1992, sec. Entertainment.

¹¹¹ Gudgeon, “Fortune’s Favourite Fools.”

Conclusion

This chapter demonstrated that, during a period of disintegration for mainstream rock in Canada during the early 1990s, dominant understandings of gender, sexuality, race, and place both individually and collectively shaped the discourse about authenticity. Heteropatriarchy clearly influenced discussions of Glass Tiger's experiments with hard rock on *Simple Mission*, as well as deliberations over the appropriateness of the band name Barenaked Ladies. It also formed the subtext of most lyrical content and conversations about crowd composition by implying that straight men became naturally vested in power. At the same time, rock music continued to function as a White cultural expression in Canada. This tacit colour line surfaced in the discourse about authenticity when The Tragically Hip and Barenaked Ladies mixed genres by mimicking traditionally Black musical styles. Finally, a sense of place emerged as a significant marker of rock legitimacy. In the wake of the Meech Lake Accord debacle, The Tragically Hip waded into the ongoing debate over Canada's official languages with "Born In The Water," which chided anglophone bigots in Ontario.

Appendix 4.1: Lyrics for Blue Rodeo's "Til I Am Myself Again"

I want to know where my confidence went, one day it all disappeared
And I'm lying in a hotel room miles away, voices next door in my ear

Well, daytime's a drag, Nighttime's worse, hope that I can get home soon
But the half-finished bottles of inspiration lie like ghosts in my room

I want to go, I know I can't stay
But I don't want to run feeling this way,
Til I am myself
Til I am myself
Til I am myself again

There's a seat on the corner I keep every night, wait til the evening begins
I feel like a stranger from another world but at least I'm living again

There are nights full of anger, words that are thrown, tempers that are shattered and thin
But the moments of magic are just too short, they're over before they begin

I know it's time, One big step
I can't go, I'm not ready yet
Til I am myself
Til I am myself
Til I am myself again

I had a dream that my house was on fire, people laughed while it burned
I tried to run but my legs were numb, I had to wait til the feeling returned

Well, I don't need a doctor to figure it out, I know what's passing me by
When I look in the mirror, sometimes I see traces of some other guy

Well, I want to go, I know I can't stay
But I don't want to run feeling this way
Til I am myself
Til I am myself
Til I am myself again

Appendix 4.2: Lyrics for The Tragically Hip's "Born In The Water"

Rolling hills all covered in suede
I'm heat nervous and out of road
Downtown, there's a parade
But I don't think I wanna go
Smart as trees in Sault Saint Marie
I can speak my mother tongue
Passing laws just because
And singing songs of the English unsung

How could you do it? Well, how could you even try?
When you were born in the water
And you were raised up in the sky

Front seat stamped by the windows
No erases in this game
Arbitrary as the wind blows
It's another way to lay claim
Ain't no cause for bloodthirsting
In a little town so dry
Well, angels dance on a pinhead
Just to make room for you and I

How could you do it? How could you even try?
When you were born in the water
And you were raised up in the sky

Thoroughbred with their great big heads
Think a mile might be too far
Highway horses laugh, but of course
When they don't know where the hell they are
Smart as trees in Sault Saint Marie
Victorious mother tongue
Passing laws just because
And singing songs of the English unsung

Well, how could you do it? How could you even try?
When you were born in the water
And you were raised up
How could you do it? How could you even try?
When you were born in the water
And you were raised up in the sky

Appendix 4.3: Lyrics for The Tragically Hip's "Little Bones"

It gets so sticky down here
Better butter your cue finger up
It's the start of another new year
Better call the newspaper up
Two fifty for a hi-ball
And buck and a half for a beer
Happy hour, happy hour, happy hour is here

The long days of Shockley are gone
So is football Kennedy style
Famous last words taken all wrong
Wind up on the very same pile
Two fifty for a decade
And a buck and a half for a year
Happy hour, happy hour, happy hour is here

I can cry, beg and whine to every rebel I find
Just to give me a line I could use to describe

They'd say, "Baby, eat this chicken slow
It's full of all them little bones"
Baby, eat this chicken slow
It's full of all them little bones

So regal and decadent here
Coffin cheaters dance on their graves
Music all it's delicate fear
Is the only thing that don't change
Two fifty for an eyeball
And a buck and a half for an ear
Happy hour, happy hour, happy hour is here

Well, nothing's dead down here, it's just a little tired
Nothing's dead down here, it's just a little tired
Nothing's dead down here, it's just a little tired
Nothing's dead down here, it's just a little tired

Baby, eat this chicken slow
It's full of all them little bones
Baby, eat this chicken slow
It's full of all them little bones
Little bones
Full of all them little bones
Little bones

Appendix 4.4: Lyrics for Glass Tiger's "Animal Heart"

Just as the daytime turns into nighttime,
I know that I can turn to you
And as the river runs to the ocean,
I know that I can run to you
Just like the rich man needs lots of money,
Listen, woman, I need you
Just like a hunter stalks the hunted
In a jungle of lust, it's true...

I've got an animal heart when I see you
Animal heart
I'll do anything you want me to
I've got an animal heart
This love for you never changes
No, no

Pressure's rising, I see your eyes and
I know that the "game" is you
You keep me running, but I'm still coming
Oh, lover, do the things you do
Oh, with a young heart, well, I'm never lonely,
Oh, but listen, woman, I need you
My heart is aching, my body's shaking
Oh, but one thing that I know is true...

I've got an animal heart when I see you
Animal heart
I'll do anything you want me to
I've got an animal heart
This love for you never changes

I've got an animal heart when I see you
Animal heart
I'll do anything you want me to
I've got an animal heart
This love for you never changes
No, no

I've got an animal heart when I see you
Animal heart
I've got an, an, an, an, an, an, an, an, an, an, an, animal heart

Appendix 4.5: Lyrics for Glass Tiger's "One Night Alone"

Well when I first met you
I thought
It's too good to be true
You had a look in those evil eyes
That said
"What do you want me to do to you?"
Some people talk about heroes
I know I must be one
Part of the walking and wounded

Young boy--take cover
She's "incoming" and she's looking
For another lover
Give me one night alone
Put out this fire baby
Take me home
Give me one night alone
One night alone

So take a cold-hearted woman
Just like lovin' on ice
She knows how to forget you
So boy you better get it right
This time
Told me you'd make
Me your lover
That's why I gave into you
You chewed me up
Then you spat me out again

Oh baby—you're no lady
You give me give me fever
Crank it up and drive me crazy
It's not the Garden of Eden
No it's not paradise
I bit the apple
Now I'm here to play for you
Hey baby—you're no lady
You give me give me fever
Crank it up and
Drive me crazy

Appendix 4.6: Lyrics for Glass Tiger's "(She Said) Love Me Like A Man"

The story so far the young boy
Makes it all alone
In walks a diamond
She says
"Lover take me home"
Oh--red car and black horse
Speed me
Taste of sweat and fear
You walk in her room
Your heart beat
Seems to disappear
She'll bleed your heart
She'll steal your fortune
Sharp as a knife
She'll cut you
Down, down, down

(She said) love me like a man
Lover, take it slow
Love like a man
Gonna give me more
Love me like a man
Give me all you've got
Are you ready? Are you ready?

I can remember thinking
Take it like a man
That only made her smile right at me
Warm as the sun
She turns to tell me
Then colder than ice
She turns away
Are you ready?
Are you ready?
Turn it up and take me...
Downtown

Appendix 4.7: Third Verse Lyrics for Public Enemy's "Fight the Power"

Elvis was a hero to most
But he never meant shit to me you see
Straight up racist that sucker was
Simple and plain
Mother fuck him and John Wayne
'Cause I'm black and I'm proud
I'm ready and hyped plus I'm amped
Most of my heroes don't appear on no stamps
Sample a look back you look and find
Nothing but rednecks for four hundred years if you check
Don't worry be happy was a number one jam
Damn, if I say it you can slap me right here
Let's get this party started right
Right on, c'mon, what we got to say
Power to the people, no delay
Make everybody see in order to fight the powers that be

Revised Version by Barenaked Ladies

Elvis was a hero to most
Buddy, Elvis was a hero to most
Buddy Ebsen was a hero to most
Buddy Rich was a hero to most
Buddy Hackett was a hero to most
Nutty Putty was a hero to most
But they never meant shit to me
See how straight out racist the sucker
They're similar playing
Would say fight the power

Appendix 4.8: Lyrics to “Be My Yoko Ono” by Barenaked Ladies

If there's someone you can live without, then do so
And if there's someone you can just shove out, well do so

You can be my Yoko Ono
You can follow me wherever I go
Be my, be my, be my, be my Yoko Ono, whoa oh

Isn't it beautiful to see two people so much in love?
Bare naked as two virgins hand in hand, and hand in hand in love
Now that I'm far away it doesn't seem to me to be such a pain
To have you hanging off my ankle like some kind of ball and chain

You can be my Yoko Ono
You can follow me wherever I go
Be my, be my, be my, be my Yoko Ono, whoa oh (be my Yoko)

Oh no, here we go
Our life is just one big pun
Ono, here we go as Yoko sings woo ho ho ho ho ho

I know that when I say this I may be stepping on pins and needles (ho ho whoa)
But I don't like all these people slagging her for breaking up the Beatles
(Don't blame it on Yokey)
I mean if I was John and you were Yoko I would gladly give up musical genius
Just to have you as my very own personal Venus
(To doo to to to, hit it)

You can be my Yoko Ono (oh, whoa oh)
You can follow me wherever I go
Be my, be my, be my, be my Yoko Ono, whoa oh
Be my, be my, be my, be my, be my Yoko Ono, whoa
Be my, be my, be my, be my, be my Yoko Ono, whoa
Be my, be my, be my, be my, be my Yoko Ono, whoa whoa oh

Chapter Five: From the Margins to the Mainstream, 1991-1993

During the early 1990s, a heterogeneous mix of bands that had each recently resided on the margins of rock music in Canada now constituted the cutting-edge mainstream. Cowboy Junkies started out as a group of fringe dwellers that transformed blues and country standards into hushed, expansive pieces not suited for commercial radio play. Nevertheless, against all odds, the Toronto-based quartet's second independently produced album turned into a critical and financial success in 1989. Two years later, on its fourth LP, Cowboy Junkies had become a rock fixture in Canada. Jim Cuddy and Greg Keelor, the founders of Blue Rodeo, imagined themselves as outsider artists living at the edge of society. Their band's fresh take on country-tinged rock, however, unexpectedly led them to the top of the Canadian charts by the turn of the 1980s. Blue Rodeo struggled to maintain its alternative roots as the ensemble navigated the mainstream. In 1992, Barenaked Ladies, a virtually unknown independent comedic acoustic quintet from suburban Toronto, delivered the largest selling major label debut album in Canadian sound recording history. Somehow this quirky bunch of self-professed social outcasts made it big. Yet, such widespread success cost Barenaked Ladies its alternative credibility. The Tragically Hip arose during the mid-1980s in opposition to the New Romantic bands that dominated the airwaves back then. The Kingston outfit's brand of

blues-oriented rock took years to catch on. By the end of 1992, though, The Tragically Hip ruled mainstream English-Canadian rock. This chapter highlights the dialogic nature of popular music production and reception in Canada. Despite occupying prevalent positions rife with complicity, these four diverse groups maintained a few oppositional stances traditionally associated with the margins, subverting some dominant ideologies in the process.

This chapter traces both continuity and change within the discourse about authenticity during the early 1990s, when alternative music moved from the margins to the mainstream in Canada. Hetero-patriarchy persisted as a regular factor shaping discussions of what encompassed legitimate rock music. Meanwhile, Whiteness functioned largely as an unarticulated presupposition of authenticity. Exhibiting a sense of place, which had functioned as a principal marker of valid rock music for years, gained even more importance. Cowboy Junkies and Blue Rodeo tackled political material for the first time, railing against the effects of neoliberalism and in favour of Indigenous land claims, respectively. Barenaked Ladies endlessly referenced growing up in suburban Toronto. Plus, The Tragically Hip stocked its latest LP with several ideologically charged national identifiers. A heightened sensitivity to the expression of place marked English-Canadian sound recording at the time. This chapter demonstrates that a shifting multifaceted discourse about authenticity regulated the production and reception of rock music in the early 1990s, strongly associating the cultural form with heterosexuality, manliness, Whiteness, and residency in the English-speaking Lake Ontario region.

A Modern Canterbury Tales

In early February 1992, when Cowboy Junkies played an *Intimate & Interactive* television show on MuchMusic, more than a year had passed since the band last performed a live concert in Canada. Participating in the third edition of the ambitious broadcast series enabled the Toronto-based group to introduce its purportedly rockier sound and new line up to viewers across the country.¹ Cowboy Junkies possessed plenty of small-screen experience, having already appeared on key American television spots: *Saturday Night Live*, *The Tonight Show*, *Late Night with David Letterman*, and *Austin City Limits*. Still, producing music on camera in front of a studio audience remained a difficult yet potentially rewarding task for the ensemble. “TV is a real challenge, if you’re performing live,” lead singer Margo Timmins shared. “You can’t warm up and build to a climax, but when you take that risk of getting it right, it gives an edge to the performance that can be wonderful.”² *Intimate & Interactive* constituted equal parts town hall meeting and back yard jam session. Between mini-sets taped live before a cozy crowd of 150 die-hard fans, MuchMusic opened its phone and fax lines nationwide, allowing Cowboy Junkies to field questions directly from viewers coast-to-coast. This innovative program exemplified how the influential music station fostered what communications scholar Will Straw identified as “the embedding of music within complex layers of discourse *about* music.”³ By shedding light on the culture surrounding the band’s repertoire, MuchMusic helped establish the “apparatus of celebrity” necessary for Cowboy Junkies to succeed in

¹ Percussionist David Houghton, accordion player Jaro Czerwinec, and pedal steel guitarist Kim Deschamps no longer worked with Cowboy Junkies. In their stead, long-time Jane Siberry guitarist Ken Myhr had joined the fold, along with Belleville, Ontario, native Spencer Evans on keyboards and clarinet.

² John Doyle, “A Family Affair,” *The Globe and Mail*, 1 February 1992, sec. Special.

³ Will Straw, “Sound Recording,” in *The Cultural Industries in Canada: Problems, Policies, and Prospects*, ed. Michael Dorland (Toronto: J. Lorimer & Co, 1996), 109.

Canada as sound recording artists.⁴ In this manner, *Intimate & Interactive* served as a perfect promotional vehicle for the group's latest album.

Cowboy Junkies instituted a novel approach to making its fourth LP, *Black Eyed Man*. Rather than recording all the new material in one extended session, the group developed songs in bunches of two or three, rehearsing each batch for weeks before putting the tunes on tape, creating the album piecemeal over the first half of 1991.⁵ Bandleader Michael Timmins wrote all ten original tracks on *Black Eyed Man*. Once he completed the chords and lyrics for a couple of songs, he took them to his sister, Margo, who brought the words to life with her vocals. Bassist Alan Anton and drummer Peter Timmins then joined the creative process and together the foursome worked out a feel – the tempo and rhythm – for every tune, which took a considerable amount of time. Next, Cowboy Junkies headed to Grant Avenue Studios in Hamilton, Ontario, and recorded the songs live off the floor as an ensemble. Michael Timmins, who produced *Black Eyed Man*, brought in guest musicians after that to lay down some overdubs, finalizing the arrangements he had envisioned. Cowboy Junkies seized every opportunity to push the boundaries of its sound. “You see, we’ve explored the very, very slow and intimate ideas, and quite thoroughly, over the first three records,” Michael Timmins explained. “Now we’re not about to throw that out, and there will always be that element in our records, but now we can begin to experiment with other styles and grooves.”⁶ *Black Eyed Man*, as a result, shifted musically from track to track, unlike previous albums, incorporating more upbeat songs than before.

⁴ Straw, “Sound Recording,” 109.

⁵ Karen Bliss, “Soul Mining: Subterranean Blues...among Other Things,” *CD Plus Compact Disc Catalogue*, Spring/Summer 1992.

⁶ Stephen Ostick, “Cowboy Junkies Slowly Pick up Speed,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, 28 May 1992, sec. Entertainment.

Cowboy Junkies released its fourth LP in February 1992. The Canadian music press received the collection of tunes well, for the most part.⁷ “Easily the most satisfying Junkies album to date, and a good premonition of the future,” Nick Krewen declared.⁸ Critics categorized the sounds on *Black Eyed Man* in their reviews, tapping into the discourse of sonic authenticity in the process. Many a music journalist praised Cowboy Junkies for pursuing a heightened rock sound on the record while remaining faithful to its laconic country-blues roots. Michael Timmins’s vivid, literary lyrics, impressed critics even more. “*Black Eyed Man* works like a modern *Canterbury Tales*,” Evelyn Erskine proclaimed. “The stories were compiled on the road and, unlike most tour-bus-created material, these songs work.”⁹ For Erskine, this ability to relate universal truths and emotions through descriptive microcosmic narratives warranted the ascription of sonic authenticity. Not all music journalists fully agreed, however. Helen Metella thought Timmins represented a developing writer. He occasionally hit the mark beautifully, but more often he offered one-dimensional, unoriginal observations.¹⁰

Several music critics regarded “The Last Spike,” whose title comprised an ironic take on Pierre Berton’s book of the same name, as one of the most powerful songs on *Black Eyed Man*. Its richly topical material saw Cowboy Junkies take on a political subject for the very first time: reading like a litany of charges against Prime Minister Brian Mulroney’s Tory policies. “The Last Spike” began with Michael Timmins lightly

⁷ Of the twelve album reviews published during the *Black Eyed Man* press cycle, eight glowed, three wavered, and one dismissed the LP.

⁸ Nick Krewen, “Lou Reed, Eric Clapton, Junkies All Deliver,” *The Hamilton Spectator*, 8 February 1992, sec. Now.

⁹ Evelyn Erskine, “Cowboy Junkies: Canadian Group’s Third Album Puts Them Back on Track after Second Release Flopped,” *The Ottawa Citizen*, 8 February 1992, sec. Entertainment.

¹⁰ Helen Metella, “Handful of Gems amid the Music on Cowboy Junkies’ Latest LP,” *The Edmonton Journal*, 2 February 1992, sec. Entertainment.

strumming a slow-paced acoustic guitar riff. Moments later, the plaintive plucking of banjo by Lewis Melville arose just as Margo Timmins's hushed, whispery vocals started up. With minimal acoustic instrumentation and ideologically charged lyrics, the song bore a distinct folk music style.¹¹ Michael Timmins wrote "The Last Spike" in response to the intensification of neoliberalism during the early 1990s under the Mulroney government. He said the tune reflected his concern for the country's future: "It's about the closing down of everything in Canada. Everything seems to be cut back or disintegrating. It's kind of strange."¹² The song recounted the drastic effects that curbing railway routes, privatizing postal services, and economizing public television had on small-town Canada and, on a larger scale, the national dream.¹³ In "The Last Spike," Cowboy Junkies positioned the railway as the backbone of an extractive resource economy that had left many rural people high and dry. An old post office building, which ostensibly closed as part of Mulroney's rationalization of Canada Post Corporation, served as a cenotaph to the social responsibilities of that public institution. The impending closure of the local CBC television station portended the community's demise. Cowboy Junkies told a sombre tale of hapless Canadians suffering the consequences for political decisions beyond their control. With "The Last Spike,"

¹¹ To view the lyrics for "The Last Spike" by Cowboy Junkies, see Appendix 5.1.

¹² Peter Howell, "Getting Intimate with Cowboy Junkies on MuchMusic," *The Toronto Star*, 6 February 1992, sec. Entertainment.

¹³ In 1990, the Mulroney government introduced severe cutbacks to national rail service, including an end to several historic routes and the near elimination of passenger train lines. Daniel Francis, *National Dreams: Myth, Memory, and Canadian History* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1997), 15-16; At the same time, the Progressive Conservative government implemented a plan to close or privatize the 5,200 rural post offices in Canada. Thirty percent of that rural network had been transformed by 1992. Robert M. Campbell, *The Politics of Postal Transformation: Modernizing Postal Systems in the Electronic and Global World* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), 280-281; Cuts in federal government budget subsidies also forced the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) to shutter eleven of seventeen local CBC television stations in late 1990. Patrick Doyle, "11 Stations Cut, 1100 Fired Expect 'Profound Impact' on Network, President Predicts," *The Toronto Star*, 6 December 1990, sec. News.

Timmins offered listeners his take on how neoliberalism contributed to a changing sense of place in Canada during the early 1990s.

Still, despite the band's use of ideologically charged Canadian national identifiers on "The Last Spike," music journalists in Canada sensed a powerful American influence on *Black Eyed Man*, particularly in the album's opening track and lead single, "Southern Rain." The unconventional love song reflected Cowboy Junkies' seemingly endless study of Dixieland. "We're fascinated with the Southern states. They're so mythical," Margo Timmins admitted, speaking for the band. "And all the great music comes from the South. We feel like we're sitting on the border being voyeurs."¹⁴ Set in motion by the steady chunky sound of Michael Timmins on electric guitar and a memorable lick from lead guitarist Ken Myhr, "Southern Rain" established the group's new tone with a rollicking start. Soon drummer Peter Timmins and bassist Alan Anton joined the mix, providing the rumbling rhythmic pace and soothing harmonic structure of the track. A solitary accordion line by Jaro Czerwinec graced each chorus section. Meanwhile, Margo Timmins delivered the melody with a confident playful swing, displaying her growth both as a singer and interpreter of her older brother's lyrics.¹⁵ "Southern Rain" contained three distinct romantic narratives that each offered a different woman's perspective on rain showers in the United States. Every emotional vignette, whether set in Virginia or California, revolved around a popular American saying taken from a Henry Wadsworth Longfellow poem: "Into each life some rain must fall."¹⁶ Nevertheless, to the characters in the song, instead of signifying darkness and dreariness, southern rain represented

¹⁴ Steve Morse, "Junkies Come on Strong," *The Province*, 19 February 1992, sec. Showcase.

¹⁵ To view the lyrics for "Southern Rain" by Cowboy Junkies, see Appendix 5.2.

¹⁶ Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, "The Rainy Day," *The Poetical Works of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1876), 174.

domestic bliss, nostalgic escape, and welcome companionship. “Southern Rain” did rather well as a single on Canadian radio, becoming the biggest hit to date for the Toronto ensemble. It reached number twenty on the *RPM* 100 Hot Tracks chart in March 1992.¹⁷

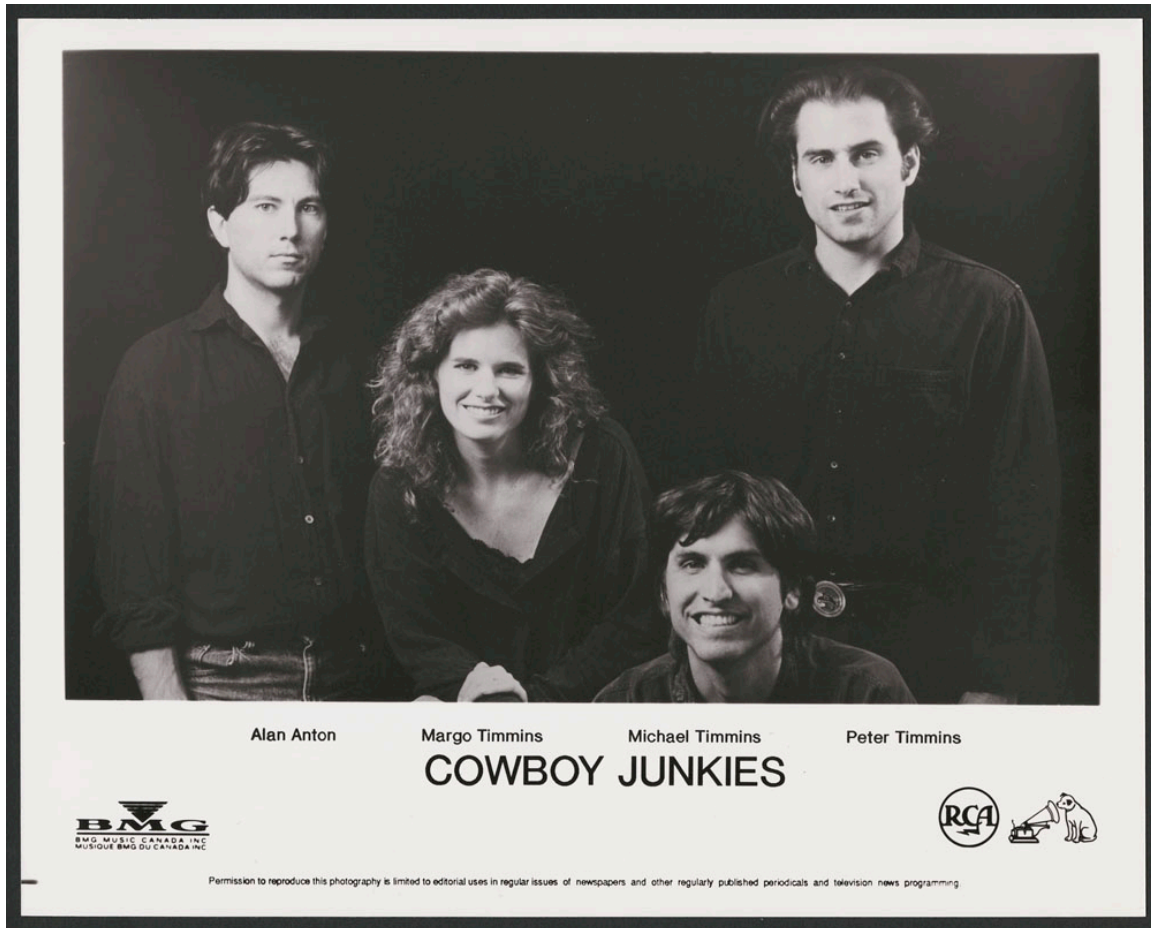


Image 5.1: Cowboy Junkies promotional photograph from 1992.¹⁸

Cowboy Junkies harnessed the communicative medium of music video to construct and advertise its visual identity in 1992. The four-minute commercial for “Southern Rain,” for instance, presented the band as serious, skilled musicians while also relating a compelling narrative based on the song’s lyrical content. Director Dale Heslip conflated the multiple storylines found in “Southern Rain” into a single romantic

¹⁷ “RPM - Library and Archives Canada,” accessed 2 May 2016, <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/rpm>.

¹⁸ “Cowboy Junkies.” BMG Music Canada Publicity Photograph. Canada: BMG Music Canada, 1992. Library and Archives Canada, *RPM fonds*. <http://collectionscanada.gc.ca> (accessed 14 January 2017).

scenario. Heslip developed the sentimental narrative through a series of thirteen *tableaux vivants* in which he carefully posed and dramatically lit costumed actors, who neither spoke nor moved throughout the duration of each well-appointed display. During these fixed moments, aspects of painting, sculpture, and theatre melded within the postmodern cultural aesthetic of music video.¹⁹ Furthermore, by having the camera truck left or right at those points of stasis, Heslip heightened the intermediality of the *tableaux vivants* interspersed throughout the video for “Southern Rain.” The remaining screen time featured three different types of performance clips: close-ups of Margo Timmins lip-syncing into a vintage postwar microphone; incredibly tight shots of Michael Timmins, Alan Anton, and Peter Timmins each pretending to play their respective instruments; and, lastly, wide angles of the whole quartet working the tune together on a staged set. Cowboy Junkies loaded its video for “Southern Rain” with fabricated exhibitions of musicianship, understanding that the ascription of embodied authenticity demanded the demonstration of ability. The group’s fashion choices also determined its rock credibility. Because of their casual, unadorned sense of style, band members appeared to care less about image and more about performing art. This attitude epitomized embodied authenticity in Canada at the time.

Cowboy Junkies spent much of 1992 on the road supporting the release of *Black Eyed Man*. First, the band tested out its latest material and new seven-piece line up on a two-week warm up tour in California and New York before launching a longer series of shows in Europe that March, including a sold-out night at the prestigious Royal Albert

¹⁹ Steven Jacobs, *Framing Pictures: Film and the Visual Arts* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 94.

Hall in London, England.²⁰ The group then completed a string of five central Canadian dates in soft seat theatres to crowds of up to 2300 people per gig. Cowboy Junkies decided not to play east of Montréal because the potential cost of taking its tour buses and a tractor-trailer full of gear to the Maritimes proved prohibitive.²¹ In late May, after putting in several weeks of hard work in the United States, the Toronto-based ensemble returned to Canada for a select number of concerts out west. With another circuit of Europe in June, plus tours of Japan and Australia that fall, Cowboy Junkies endured a hectic schedule in 1992. Being away from the comforts of home and in a state of constant motion had its drawbacks, yet the collective communication afforded by playing live saw band members through. “It’s kind of a weird life,” Michael Timmins said of the road. “The only thing that makes it bearable are the performances every night. As long as that is satisfying and is maintaining you, you can put up with the rest.”²²

Music journalists who caught one of the few Canadian stops on the *Black Eyed Man* tour effusively praised the show. Critics assessed the performances of band members and the reactions of ticket holders to them through the discourse of communal authenticity. Cowboy Junkies took the stage unannounced, filing into position silently. Michael Timmins sat on a chair and hunched over his guitar, absorbed in his world. Margo Timmins perched on a stool up front. A vase of flowers and a teacup rested on a table beside her. The rest of the group nested in the background behind the singer. Strategically placed and paced computerized lights added rich pastels and intriguing

²⁰ Thor Valdmanis, “Cowboys Ride a New Range,” *The Globe and Mail*, 9 March 1992, sec. Entertainment.

²¹ Tim Arsenault, “Cowboy Junkies back to Form with New Album,” *The Chronicle Herald*, 8 February 1992, sec. Entertainment.

²² Lynn Saxberg, “Cowboy Junkies; Toronto Band’s Latest Album Takes Its Quieter Sound More Uptempo,” *The Ottawa Citizen*, 26 March 1992, sec. Entertainment.

shadings to the scenography. Music journalists marvelled at the excellent standard of rock musicianship on display. “The Cowboy Junkies appeared in a seven-piece configuration, the best line-up we’ve seen of this band,” Lenny Stoute concluded. “Opinions may differ as to the worth of individual songs, but the inventiveness and brilliance of the ensemble playing was never in doubt.”²³ The septet’s cleverly nuanced textures and complementary atmospherics thrilled Stoute. Critics took special note of energetic electric guitarist Ken Myhr, whose abilities garnered plenty of ink. “Myhr’s leads and slide work were particularly moving, and brought the instrumentals to a lush plateau previously unreached,” Stephen Ostick noted.²⁴ Nonetheless, despite the flashy and talented new axeman, Margo Timmins remained the centre of attention. Concert reviewers routinely pointed out her appearance before discussing her singing performance. Timmins, they observed, continued to paddle softly through quiet passages yet displayed a newfound power when the moment demanded. Music journalists also considered audience reactions when evaluating whether a Cowboy Junkies show qualified as a genuine incarnation of rock music in Canada. A mixture of university students and young professionals largely formed the crowds for the *Black Eyed Man* tour. Attentive and adoring ticket holders asked for multiple encores each night. Critics witnessed collective communication clearly flowing between band and audience members, and ascribed communal authenticity accordingly.

²³ Lenny Stoute, “Cowboy Junkies’ Earobic Workout,” *The Toronto Star*, 30 March 1992, sec. Entertainment.

²⁴ Stephen Ostick, “Junkies Display Growth,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, 30 May 1992, sec. Entertainment.

Black Eyed Man sold rather well in Canada at first, reaching gold album certification in just three weeks.²⁵ Sales tapered off after that, however, as the record ultimately failed to match the commercial heights of previous LPs. Cowboy Junkies tried to resist the economic pressures of working in the sound recording industry. “We just keep in mind our goal, which is to do the music we want,” Alan Anton revealed in a moment of candour. “Although that becomes more of a struggle, when you’re associated with a corporation and there’s expectations that are on a purely monetary level.”²⁶ By positioning autonomy as the key to negotiating those financial imperatives, Anton aligned with the discourse of folkloric authenticity. For him, independence, albeit a challenge to maintain, enabled Cowboy Junkies to produce rock music for artistic purposes rather than corporate ones. Be that as it may, a number of critics described *Black Eyed Man* as the group’s most commercial album to date.²⁷ Cowboy Junkies definitely formed part of the popular music mainstream in Canada, though its recognition had clearly started to wane.

We Are Lost Together

During the fall of 1991, in the months leading up to recording Blue Rodeo’s fourth studio album, Jim Cuddy and Greg Keelor listened to a lot of strident alternative rock, including new material by Smashing Pumpkins and Circle C. As a result, the bandleaders wanted to make a heavier, more aggressive sounding LP. The pair asked American producer Andy Wallace, who recently mixed Nirvana’s groundbreaking *Nevermind*, to help them achieve that sonic goal, but he declined. Unsure what to do, Cuddy and Keelor decided to work

²⁵ “Gold/Platinum,” *Music Canada*, accessed 2 May 2016, <http://musiccanada.com/gold-platinum>.

²⁶ Peter Howell, “New Rhythms Rock Junkies’ Vow of Silence,” *The Toronto Star*, 26 March 1992, sec. Entertainment.

²⁷ Saxberg, “Cowboy Junkies; Toronto Band’s Latest Album Takes Its Quieter Sound More Uptempo.”

with Pete Anderson once again. That idea, though, quickly changed. “He wanted to make a different record than we did,” Cuddy stated, referring to Anderson. “I think he wanted it to be slicker. And he wanted us to record it in Los Angeles, which we didn’t want to do.”²⁸ Finding it increasingly hard to take direction from a third party, Cuddy and Keelor chose to produce the upcoming album themselves. The pair felt confident that only they could capture the sound they wanted Blue Rodeo to have. “People say you should never do your own record,” Keelor remarked. “But I figure if you play music, the more involved you are in the whole process, the trippier it all gets.”²⁹ In December 1991, as Blue Rodeo prepared itself for re-entering the studio, Cuddy and Keelor replaced drummer Mark French with popular sideman Glenn Milchem, whose background included stints with numerous Toronto jazz, folk rock, and pop-metal bands. The pair simply felt Milchem better suited the rhythmically diverse LP they had planned.

Blue Rodeo recorded its fourth album at Toronto’s Eastern Sound Studios in early 1992 with the assistance of engineer Peter Doell. “It was an enriching time and also very hard work,” Jim Cuddy recalled. “It was brutal. Deciding to produce ourselves put us under a lot of pressure and I think it’s a credit to Keelor’s and my sensibilities and friendship that we’re still talking to one another. We had all kinds of arguments – some from vanity, some childish, some trivial.”³⁰ The bandleaders worked out tough compromises all along the way. Still, self-producing afforded Blue Rodeo the ability to experiment with musical meanderings and create a loose, tough collection of tunes.

Cuddy and Keelor moved the drums up in the mix to share focus with their vocals, which

²⁸ Helen Metella, “New Hands Changin’ Blue Rodeo’s Corral; Keyboardist Strays but Adventure Continues with Latest Album,” *The Edmonton Journal*, 5 July 1992, sec. Entertainment.

²⁹ Tim Powis, “Blue Rodeo,” *Music Express*, August 1992.

³⁰ Tom Harrison, “Blue Rodeo Backs Battle for Nature,” *The Province*, 24 July 1992, sec. Preview.

continued to define Blue Rodeo's sound. The pair also intensified the presence of their electric six strings. "We wanted the guitars to be more aggressive," Keelor confirmed. "We're not as jangly and chimey as we used to be. The guitars are dronier on this record, or thuddier."³¹ Additional musical changes included the first-time use of pedal steel guitar, violin, cello, and a guest backup singer, Michelle McAdorey from Crash Vegas. Though not without its gentle moments, Cuddy and Keelor captured a louder, rougher Rodeo ride. Naming the LP *Lost Together* seemed particularly appropriate to the producers, in light of the lengthy, contentious recording process that looked over their heads at points.³² Teamwork in times of adversity had allowed Cuddy and Keelor to produce the album they wanted. Then, in April 1992, as the bandleaders put the final touches on *Lost Together*, a major crisis arose: keyboardist extraordinaire Bobby Wiseman, who had contributed a dizzying array of sonic detours on the latest album, announced his departure from the group.

Jim Cuddy and Greg Keelor suspected Bobby Wiseman would leave Blue Rodeo at some point, just not that soon. Cuddy provided some context:

The Bobby situation was something we had to live with for a long time, and it had its frustrations and its highs. It was always a pleasure to play with Bobby, but he was not a happy musician within the band for the last...I would say...two years. So that created its own frustrations, but his leaving is a sort of a brotherly thing. There were moments when we thought, "Oh, f--k you, what's the matter with you, why can't you see such a good thing?" But we really appreciated what it must have been like for Bobby. Once he developed his own supersonic soloing style, Blue Rodeo really wasn't enough for him.³³

³¹ Powis, "Blue Rodeo."

³² "Blue Rodeo: Renegade Country," *Country Music News*, September 1992.

³³ Peter Howell, "Blue Rodeo...and Life without Bobby," *The Toronto Star*, 23 July 1992, sec. Entertainment.

Wiseman, though, represented more than just a wildly imaginative keyboardist. The accomplished singer-songwriter also had two solo albums under his belt. Plus, he regularly produced sound recordings for other artists. Nevertheless, despite his outward signs of discontent playing for Blue Rodeo and his burgeoning career outside of the group, Cuddy and Keelor thought Wiseman would certainly participate in the *Lost Together* tour with them. No such luck. Wiseman submitted his resignation to the bandleaders in the spring of 1992, shortly after American songstress Edie Brickell asked him to produce her new LP that summer. Both Blue Rodeo and Wiseman each released amicable statements to the Canadian music press about departing on good terms.³⁴ Cuddy and Keelor took months to find a suitable replacement for the talented keyboardist. In the meantime, they added ex-Cowboy Junkie pedal steel guitarist Kim Deschamps to the line-up. Finally, in July 1992, just after releasing the band's fourth album, Cuddy and Keelor announced that James Gray, the former Rheostatics keysman, had also become an official member of Blue Rodeo.

The critical reaction to *Lost Together* in Canada brimmed with compliments. Music journalists praised Blue Rodeo's retreat from the taut mainstream sound of *Casino* and return to the expansive alternative style of its first two albums. Categorization of the band's latest collection of songs figured prominently in all their record reviews. "Blue Rodeo has country elements in its sound," John Mackie conceded, "but by and large it's a rock band, a fairly adventurous rock band at that."³⁵ Mackie's peers tended to agree with

³⁴ "Bobby Wiseman Quits Blue Rodeo," *The Toronto Star*, 23 April 1992, sec. Entertainment; "Wiseman Goes Solo," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 24 April 1992, sec. Relax.

³⁵ John Mackie, "Blue Rodeo Cuts through Music Barriers," *The Vancouver Sun*, 9 July 1992, sec. Features.

him on this point and ascribed sonic authenticity to *Lost Together*.³⁶ Critics appreciated how the ensemble experimented with a number of disparate musical expressions on the LP without straying too far from its roots-rock base. Music journalists also lauded the display of songwriting depth by both Jim Cuddy and Greg Keelor. Themes of brooding loneliness, simmering anger, and hopeful defiance tempered by doubt abounded, keeping the lyrics at an emotional peak. “If there’s a flaw to *Lost Together*,” Toronto music journalist Peter Howell suggested, “it’s the lack of smooth progression from song to song – rock tunes bang into ballads like bumper cars at the CNE. And some of the longer tunes could have used a bit of editing.”³⁷ Blue Rodeo’s risky decision to record without the benefit of an experienced, critical ear behind the console gave the album a loose, underproduced feel, which Howell found less than charming. Aside from this one reservation, music journalists thought the LP exhibited some of the group’s most accomplished work to date. Jordan Zivitz concluded, matter-of-factly, “*Lost Together* is the best album of 1992.”³⁸

Critics could not help but notice the debut of decidedly political material in Blue Rodeo’s recorded music. The opening track on *Lost Together*, “Fools Like You,” resembled a classic-era Bob Dylan song of outrage. It condemned Canadian provincial and federal government leaders for their shabby treatment of Indigenous land claims. “That one was written for Bourassa and Mulroney and Siddon and all those guys,” the song’s creator, Greg Keelor, explained. “It was written during the Oka crisis. I was just

³⁶ For examples, see: Mary Lynn White, “Recent Releases,” *Calgary Herald*, 5 July 1992, sec. Entertainment; Evelyn Erskine, “Blue Rodeo Offers Another Winning Ride,” *The Ottawa Citizen*, 11 July 1992, sec. Entertainment; Peter Howell, “New Rodeo Is Straight-up Heart and Soul,” *The Toronto Star*, 18 July 1992, sec. Entertainment; Jordan Zivitz, “Music,” *The Gazette*, 19 July 1992, sec. Entertainment.

³⁷ Howell, “New Rodeo Is Straight-up Heart and Soul.”

³⁸ Zivitz, “Music.”

disgusted to be a Canadian at the time, watching those smug guys on TV.”³⁹ Blue Rodeo’s “Fools Like You” also explicitly commended Elijah Harper, an Oji-Cree member of the Manitoba legislative assembly, for having the courage to hold up that province’s ratification of the Meech Lake Accord. The protest song culminated with Keelor and Jim Cuddy, in tight harmony, repeatedly extolling non-Indigenous people in Canada: “Stop stealing the Indian land.”⁴⁰ Keelor penned “Fools Like You” in the fall of 1990, after a pivotal summer in which Indigenous peoples adamantly resisted the Canadian state’s continuing disregard of their territorial rights.⁴¹ These acts of defiance led to the inclusion of Indigenous organizations in the negotiation of the Charlottetown Accord and the initiation of a Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. At the same time, the Oka dispute, coming shortly after the rejection of the Meech Lake Accord roused political separatism in Québec, jeopardized relations between Indigenous peoples and governments in the province, and across Canada.⁴² By having “Fools Like You” on *Lost Together* and directly speaking out in favour of Indigenous land claims, Blue Rodeo expressed a progressive position on a heated topical issue. The band’s subversive use of ideologically charged national identifiers expressed a specific sense of place.

Blue Rodeo released the title track as its first single from *Lost Together*. The four-and-a-half-minute ballad built up slowly. It opened with the sound of Greg Keelor softly strumming his acoustic guitar while Bazil Donovan plucked a simple cascading bass line and Bobby Wiseman mirrored the harmonic progression on a rolling organ swell.

³⁹ Steve McLean, “New-Look Blue Rodeo out with Expansive New Album,” *RPM (Weekly)*, 11 July 1992.

⁴⁰ To view the lyrics for Blue Rodeo’s “Fools Like You,” see Appendix 5.3.

⁴¹ For a comprehensive historical account of the events from that summer, see: J.R. Miller, *Lethal Legacy: Current Native Controversies in Canada* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2004), 84-86, 165-214.

⁴² Miller, *Lethal Legacy*, 200.

Keelor's gruff lead vocals established the straightforward melody soon thereafter. Jim Cuddy's rhythmic electric guitar strokes and Glenn Milchem's measured drum strikes signalled the oncoming chorus section, where Blue Rodeo reached peak musical intensity. The lyrics for "Lost Together" told a tenderly hopeful tale of love between two self-defined outcasts.⁴³ Bewildered as to their place in urban industrial capitalist society, the pair found solace in each other. Keelor dropped his usual punchy sarcasm and determined cynicism, and let a romantic streak surface in his songwriting for once. In another unprecedented event, during the final pre-chorus of "Lost Together," Blue Rodeo incorporated orchestral strings into its sound for the first time. Violinist Ian Guenther and cellist Richard Armin each left their symphonic marks on the track, lending "Lost Together" a sense of sophistication routinely associated with elite "high culture."⁴⁴ The track did incredibly well as a single for Blue Rodeo, which desperately needed a strong radio hit to help smooth over Wiseman's untimely departure from the band, reaching number three on the *RPM* 100 Hot Tracks chart in early September 1992.⁴⁵

⁴³ To view the lyrics for Blue Rodeo's "Lost Together," see Appendix 5.4.

⁴⁴ For more on the relationship between "high culture" and popular music, see: Paul Lopes "Pierre Bourdieu's Fields of Cultural Production: A Case Study of Modern Jazz," in *Pierre Bourdieu: Fieldwork in Culture*, ed. Nicholas Brown and Imre Szeman (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000), 165–85.

⁴⁵ "RPM - Library and Archives Canada," accessed 2 June 2016, <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/rpm>.

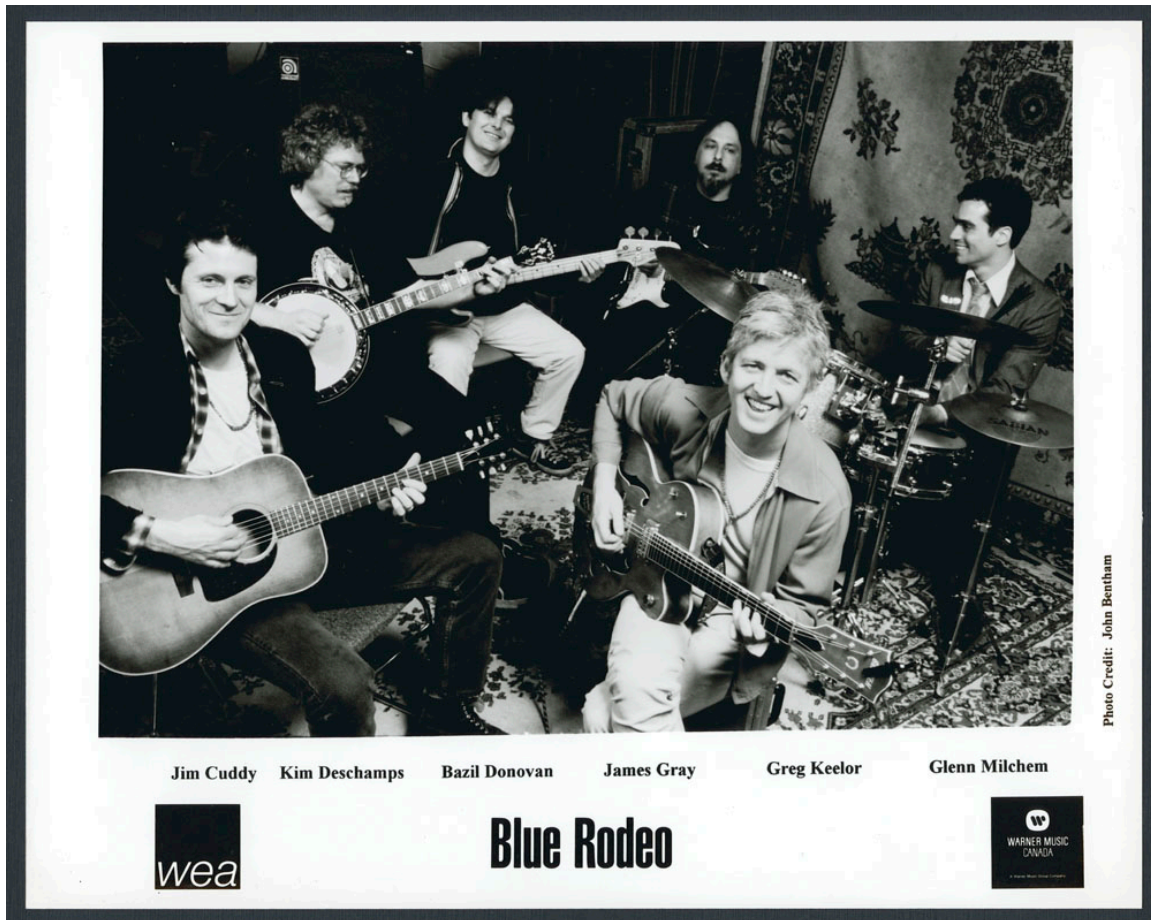


Image 5.2: Blue Rodeo promotional photograph from 1992.⁴⁶

Blue Rodeo attended to its roots rock image largely through the music video for “Lost Together.” The extended television advertisement started with an upward-moving wide pedestal shot that captured Greg Keelor standing in a verdant rural outdoor setting at dusk, strumming his acoustic guitar under a vintage wooden light post. He sported long curly blond locks, thin-rimmed metallic glasses, and a dark brown suede jacket with matching cotton slacks. An array of trees dotted the background, silhouetted in a mauve-tinted radiance. This bucolic motif continued throughout the video as it shifted rustic nighttime locations where a colourfully illuminated Blue Rodeo went through the motions of playing “Lost Together” over and over again while a crane-mounted video

⁴⁶ “Blue Rodeo.” Warner Music Canada Publicity Photograph. Canada: Warner Music Canada, 1992. Library and Archives Canada, *RPM fonds*. <http://collectionsCanada.gc.ca> (accessed 14 January 2017).

camera glided back and forth on makeshift tracks, catching the action from all the necessary angles. The group appeared as a foursome: lead singer Keelor; Jim Cuddy on electric guitar and backing vocals; bassist Bazil Donovan; and drummer Glenn Milchem, launching his small-screen debut with the ensemble.⁴⁷ Cuddy, Donovan, and Milchem all wore Blue Rodeo's standard uniform of boots, jeans, and work shirts. When it came time for the mesmerizing twenty-second keyboard solo by Bobby Wiseman, the video displayed a series of shots featuring an unmanned organ appointed with lit candelabras; a tacit nod to Wiseman's noticeable absence. Blue Rodeo's commercial for "Lost Together" presented band members as skilled performers who cared more about roots rock music than their wardrobes. This visual identity reflected the prevalent norms of embodied authenticity in Canada at the time.

Blue Rodeo totally revamped its live show in light of Bobby Wiseman's departure from the band. The group played a select number of dates across Canada in the summer of 1992 just to get the new ensemble in sync. Blue Rodeo embraced its sudden musical evolution. Greg Keelor explained:

We're having fun being a guitar band right now. It's a little grungier, it's a little more teenage. It's sort of fun. The band is totally different, with this new drummer Glenn Milchem and no keyboards, and it's sort of a bit of a mad scramble, because we've had the keyboard soloist for like seven years. All of a sudden, we've got to do the solos: it's definitely not a fine-hued act any more. And it's much more intense for us.⁴⁸

Blue Rodeo enhanced the presence of electric guitars in its live sound to compensate for the loss of Wiseman's essential services. As unaccomplished soloists, Keelor and Jim Cuddy found taking over the instrumental sections rather challenging. Canadian music

⁴⁷ In addition, at the end of the video for "Lost Together," a guest string quintet pretends to play alongside Blue Rodeo.

⁴⁸ Mackie, "Blue Rodeo Cuts through Music Barriers."

journalists who reviewed one of the revised band's early gigs clearly noticed the famed keyboardist's absence. "The energetic Wiseman was always an attraction both for his talents and on stage persona," Bernard Potvin remarked. "Both may never be replaced."⁴⁹ Recognizing the group needed to have *someone* on keyboards to properly perform much of its material, Blue Rodeo added James Gray to its line-up in July 1992. A full-fledged Canadian national tour, though, did not materialize until the fall, after the new act had gelled a bit.

When the fully remodeled Blue Rodeo hit the road to support the release of *Lost Together*, the band actively promoted more than just its fourth LP on stage. "You gotta be prepared for Greg Keelor's new pro-drug speeches on this tour," Jim Cuddy warned potential ticket holders, referring to his songwriting partner's affinity for ingesting marijuana.⁵⁰ In concert, between songs, Keelor regularly shared his advocacy of cannabis. Most music journalists let these moments pass without comment. Critic Stephen Ostick, however, found the co-frontman's "pro-drug" stance beyond the pale: "Greg Keelor apparently checked his common sense at the door. At one point, he even appealed to the audience for some marijuana."⁵¹ Ostick's reaction reflected the widespread prohibitionist position of the Canadian federal government regarding cannabis at the time and its vilification of the botanical intoxicant.⁵² Keelor's viewpoint,

⁴⁹ Bernard Potvin, "Blue Rodeo Needs Some Work after Keyboardist's Departure," *The Ottawa Citizen*, 19 May 1992, sec. Entertainment.

⁵⁰ James Murelich, "Blue Rodeo Says Yes to Shifting Styles," *Calgary Herald*, 5 July 1992, sec. Entertainment.

⁵¹ Stephen Ostick, "Soggy Officials Elated Sunfest Draws 47,000 despite Dreadful Weather," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 16 August 1993, sec. Entertainment.

⁵² Prime Minister Brian Mulroney's government introduced Canada's Drug Strategy in May 1987. It differed somewhat from the United States war on drugs with its "just say no" approach to illicit drug use by emphasizing demand reduction in the form of prevention, education, and treatment. Susan C. Boyd and

on the other hand, conformed to popular music history. Since rock's inception in the mid-1960s, some of its most famous practitioners had habitually consumed marijuana.⁵³

Canadian music journalists praised Blue Rodeo's live performances on its national tour during the fall of 1992. A simple backdrop and some projected images constituted the group's uncluttered stage set-up, which signalled that making music encompassed the ensemble's sole focus. Critics generally loved what they heard. "Blue Rodeo is without a doubt one of the finest acts ever to emerge from the Great White North," James Muretich concluded, "and their show Sunday revealed a band that has remarkably stayed true to its roots."⁵⁴ Muretich felt that the group managed to resist the pitfalls of the Canadian mainstream sound recording industry and delivered genuine alternative rock music. Without the showmanship of Bobby Wiseman to dazzle ticket holders, the crowd's attention shifted almost wholly to the electric guitar wielding frontmen, Greg Keelor and Jim Cuddy. Music journalists admired the pair's ability to pound out more powerful riffs and solos than ever before. The three new additions to Blue Rodeo each received some consideration as well: Glenn Milchem for his hard-knocking style on drums; Kim Deschamps for the countrified atmospherics of his pedal steel guitar; and James Gray for his solid understated workmanship on keyboards. According to critics, band members displayed enough musicianship to warrant the ascription of communal authenticity.⁵⁵ Music journalists also weighed audience reactions

Connie Carter, *Killer Weed: Marijuana Grow Ops, Media, and Justice* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), 54.

⁵³ George Case, *Out of Our Heads: Rock "N" Roll before the Drugs Wore off* (New York: Backbeat Books, 2010).

⁵⁴ James Muretich, "Blue Rodeo True to Roots," *Calgary Herald*, 5 October 1992, sec. Entertainment.

⁵⁵ For instance, see: Bernard Pilon, "Blue Rodeo Proves They Replace Wiseman," *The Leader-Post*, 28 September 1992, sec. Entertainment; Muretich, "Blue Rodeo True to Roots"; Mike Blanchfield, "Good Time Jamming, Dancing in the Aisles at Blue Rodeo Set," *The Ottawa Citizen*, 11 October 1992, sec.

when they assessed the quality of a Blue Rodeo concert. Crowds of between several hundred to a couple of thousand university-aged supporters filled soft-seat theatres across the country. At the behest of Keelor and Cuddy excited fans clogged the front of the stage and adjacent aisles, and gleefully danced the night away. Repeated calls for encores by attendees further indicated to critics that collective communication flowed between ticket holders and performers.

Blue Rodeo's *Lost Together* reached platinum sales status in Canada about a month after its release.⁵⁶ Consumer interest in the LP started to wane after that strong start. Yet, during the early spring of 1993, the group's first four albums hit the ample one million mark in combined Canadian sales.⁵⁷ Greg Keelor said finding commercial success at an older age helped him deal with an industry that often consumed its young:

We lived in New York for three years and finally gave up on wanting to be a rock star. We just concentrated on being a band and doing what we wanted. And that's actually when things started to happen for us. And because Blue Rodeo sort of came out of nowhere and were successful (with its first album, *Outskirts*), people – well, at least the record companies and management – haven't tried to change us.⁵⁸

Keelor credited autonomy for allowing Blue Rodeo to realize folkloric authenticity while profitably navigating the sound recording industry in Canada. Still, the spectre of widespread popularity in the United States, and the inferiority-bred esteem it would bring, continued to elude the band. Blue Rodeo's eclectic roots rock sound proved a difficult sell in America, where mainstream radio, and the major labels which serviced it, remained rigidly formatted. "La maison de disque Atlantic ne sait tout simplement pas

Entertainment; Peter Howell, "Lucinda Williams, Blue Rodeo Shoot It out at Massey Hall," *The Toronto Star*, 14 November 1992, sec. News.

⁵⁶ "Gold/Platinum," *Music Canada*, accessed 7 July 2016, <http://musiccanada.com/gold-platinum>.

⁵⁷ "Blue Rodeo Sales Reach 1 Million," *Sound Support*, November 1993.

⁵⁸ James Muretich, "Just Not Buying the Dream," *Calgary Herald*, 27 September 1992, sec. Entertainment.

quoi faire avec nous,” Jim Cuddy declared. “On ne comprend pas. Ici nos chansons tournent à la radio. Là-bas, ça ne passe pas.”⁵⁹ Blue Rodeo took heart in the fact that English-Canadian recording artists no longer had to break through in the United States market to earn a decent living in Canada.

Revenge of the Nerds

Starting in late January 1992, Barenaked Ladies spent three inspired weeks at Le Studio in Morin Heights, Québec, recording the basic instrumental performances for its debut album, *Gordon*.⁶⁰ The band laboured under the auspices of eclectic, veteran Canadian producer Michael-Phillip Wojewoda. “It turned out to be really fun,” singer-songwriter Steven Page recalled. “Michael is an incredibly easy-to-get-along-with man and we felt comfortable with the songs because we’d been playing most of them for so long.”⁶¹ Thanks to a \$100,000 Discovery-To-Disc grant from alternative radio station CFNY-FM, the group laid down the LP’s bed tracks in secluded, luxuriant conditions. “The grant money allowed us to take our time,” drummer Tyler Stewart explained. “It let us make a real record, instead of saying, ‘We can’t afford to do that.’ Picture three feet of hard-packed snow, a beautiful frozen lake, a mansion to live in, skiing and walking across the lake every morning, recording, and coming back to catered French cuisine.”⁶² The idyllic wintery Laurentian setting provided a well-needed refuge from the media feeding frenzy

⁵⁹ Translation by author: “Atlantic Records just simply does not know what to do with us. We don’t understand. Here our songs play on the radio. Down there, that does not happen.” Marc-André Joanisse, “Ce soir: Blue Rodeo à l’Opéra du CNA,” *Le Droit*, 10 October 1992, sec. Les arts.

⁶⁰ “Gordon” referred to the name of the infant character from one of the band’s unrecorded songs, “Steven Page Is Having A Baby.” “The Ladies Have Hackey Sacky Hearts,” *The Toronto Star*, 25 July 1992, sec. Entertainment.

⁶¹ Lynn Saxberg, “The Ladies and Gordon; Record Companies Started Courting Barenaked Ladies after Their Cassette Hit Platinum,” *The Ottawa Citizen*, 27 August 1992, sec. City Lights.

⁶² Howard Druckman, “Busking to the Top,” *HMV Magazine*, September 1992.

enveloping the five musicians back home in the Golden Horseshoe, enabling the band members to relax and focus solely on their music. Barenaked Ladies completed the project at Reaction Studios in Toronto, adding vocals and a plethora of overdubs: including several performances by guest musicians on fiddle, pedal steel guitar, accordion, organ, a range of horns, and even bagpipes. Wojewoda mixed all fifteen tracks on *Gordon* that March. With an international quality full-length album completed, the hottest indie band in Canada became even more desirable to the major labels.

On 27 April 1992, Barenaked Ladies signed its long-rumoured worldwide recording deal with the influential New York-based Sire Records at a press conference and live acoustic performance outside of Scarborough City Hall. Band members put their names on the thick contract in front of a boisterous crowd of more than 300 autograph-seeking fans and a host of sound recording industry types.⁶³ The local group had fielded offers from a number of companies, but, under the terms of its CFNY-FM grant, Barenaked Ladies could not sign a record deal until after it had finished recording an album independently. A combination of financial and artistic considerations, especially the promise of international exposure, led the quintet to choose Sire. Copyright complications, though, soon threatened to set aside three of the tracks that Barenaked Ladies had recently prepared for *Gordon*. Because of the ensemble's postmodern penchant for irreverential referencing of popular music hits, Sire needed to secure permission from four different recording artists to use elements of their material.⁶⁴ This

⁶³ "Barenaked Ladies Sign Worldwide Deal with Sire," *RPM (Weekly)*, 9 May 1992.

⁶⁴ Barenaked Ladies wanted to use a line from Styx's "Mr. Roboto" in "The King of Bedside Manor," an entire chorus from "Happy Hour" by The Housemartins in "Hello City," as well as parts of Rush's "Tom Sawyer" and Vince Guaraldi's "Peanuts Theme" in "Grade 9."

legal task took longer than expected to complete, forcing Sire to delay the global release of Barenaked Ladies' debut LP from mid June to late July 1992.⁶⁵

Gordon represented one of the most anticipated albums released in Canada that year by a domestic recording artist. Fortunately for Barenaked Ladies, the LP garnered high praise from a majority of Canadian music journalists. Nathalie Hansen, for instance, referred to *Gordon* as: "Un album bien fait, bien réalisé, bien mixé, bien chanté, bien écrit, bien produit, bien joué...Très bien, quoi!"⁶⁶ Hansen admired every aspect of the record, especially its pleasing mysterious quality. Critics often noted the group's apparent obsession with Anglo-American popular culture. References to various everyday consumer products and rock stars from the recent past punctuated the lyrics for *Gordon*. Barenaked Ladies eulogized the commercial commonplace with zest. Like other middle-class suburbanites of their generation, band members grew up immersed in the virtual realities of popular music, television, and movies. By expressing a strong sense of place its young contemporaries could easily relate to, Barenaked ladies had, in the words of music journalist James Muretich, "tapped into the great suburban soul."⁶⁷ Nevertheless, despite reflecting the *Zeitgeist* for young White people in the greater Toronto area, critics struggled to categorize the eclectic collection of musical sounds on *Gordon*. Most described it as a skilful blend of folk and pop arrangements with hints of jazz and country influences surfacing at different times. Not a single music journalist, whether they appreciated the LP or not, classified *Gordon* as rock. Perhaps the band's acoustic

⁶⁵ Martin Melhuish, "Barenaked Ladies Making Plans with Nigel," *The Record*, 11 May 1992.

⁶⁶ Translation by author: "An album well done, well recorded, well mixed, well sung, well written, well produced, well played... Very well, what!" Nathalie Hansen, "Émotions vibrantes, rafraîchissement et distorsion mélodique," *Le Droit*, 8 August 1992, sec. Disques.

⁶⁷ James Muretich, "The Sound of the Suburbs Is Here," *Calgary Herald*, 30 August 1992, sec. Entertainment.

instrumentation prevented some critics from doing so. Barenaked Ladies detractors found the quintet's "novelty act" material annoying and cloying, leading them to believe that *Gordon* constituted a mere comedy album and, therefore, could not seriously contend for sonic authenticity.⁶⁸ The ensemble disliked it when critics pegged the group as a wacky quintet that *only* wrote funny songs. "We don't want to be seen as a novelty band," Steven Page made clear. "There's a lot more to us than that, and we just want people to hear us."⁶⁹

Barenaked Ladies released "Enid" as the first single from *Gordon*. The upbeat-yet-bittersweet tune did amazingly well on a number of different radio formats in Canada. It spent eighteen weeks on the *RPM* 100 Hit Tracks chart, peaking at number two in early October 1992.⁷⁰ The single exhibited Barenaked Ladies' trademark adolescent wit while simultaneously showcasing the youthful quintet's serious skilled musicianship. "Enid" opened with the sound of someone tuning a Radio Shack transmitter. Through the electromagnetic static, a programmed drum beat and synthesizer line emerged. "The silence, the terror, the pain, the horror, as your mom comes downstairs," producer Michael-Phillip Wojewoda sang in a mocking Teutonic tone.⁷¹ This fourteen-second intro, a suggestive spoof of Depeche Mode, constituted one of dozens of production ideas the enterprising band came up with in the studio. "Enid" proper began with the squeaky high-pitched tones of a *cuica*. Drummer Tyler Stewart kept the uptempo rock beat going on his standard four-piece kit. Jim Creeggan accentuated the rhythmic groove with his

⁶⁸ Music journalist Dan Hughes outlined this line of critique best. See: Dan Hughes, "More than a Barenaked Novelty Act," *Network*, August 1992.

⁶⁹ Mary Dickie, "The Barenaked Ladies," *Music Express*, November 1992.

⁷⁰ "RPM - Library and Archives Canada," accessed 7 June 2016, <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/rpm>.

⁷¹ Barenaked Ladies, "Enid," *Gordon* (Sire 1992).

double bass as he laid down the tune's harmonic foundation. Andy Creeggan provided an occasional touch of piano and handled the *cuica*, a Brazilian friction drum. Plus, the nimble work of acoustic guitarist Ed Robertson helped drive the track. "Enid" also featured the performances of several guest musicians, including Lewis Melville on pedal steel guitar and the vibrant Jimmy Crack Horns.⁷² Meanwhile, Steven Page sang all the lead vocals, except for near the end of the song when Barenaked Ladies wove three distinct melodies over top of each other, creating a rich tapestry of tonal colours. Although named after a waitress from southeastern New Brunswick,⁷³ Page's first girlfriend in high school actually inspired the piece, "Enid." The tune's lyrics presented the reminiscences of a young heterosexual man who, with the aid of hindsight, realized a significant former romantic relationship seemed bound to fail.⁷⁴ Barenaked Ladies toned down its quirkiness on "Enid." Nevertheless, the group's incongruous youth-oriented sense of humour remained palpable.

⁷² The Jimmy Crack Horns featured Nic Gothan on saxophone, Chris Howells on trumpet, Gene Hardy on saxophone, and Tom Walsh on trombone.

⁷³ In the summer of 1989, Steven Page and Ed Robertson met Enid Leger, who served the pair dinner at Spanky's Pub in Moncton, New Brunswick. After talking with Leger, the duo promised to use her name for a song title. "We just thought Enid was a cool name, so we wanted to enshrine it forever in a pop song," Robertson explained nearly four years later. Alan Cochrane, "Enid Song Inspired by Waitress at Moncton Diner," *The Ottawa Citizen*, 17 April 1993, sec. Entertainment.

⁷⁴ To view the lyrics for "Enid" by Barenaked Ladies, see Appendix 5.5.

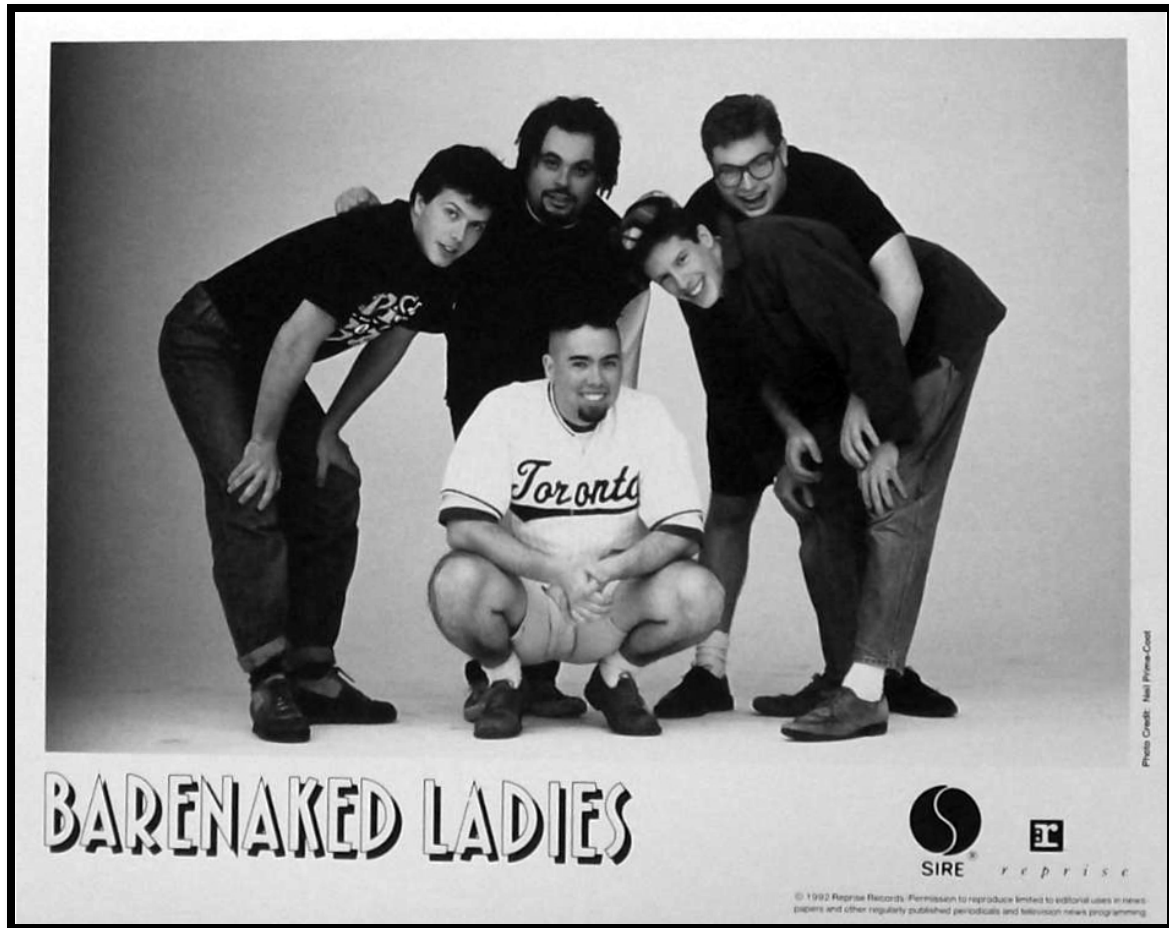


Image 5.3: Barenaked Ladies promotional photograph from 1992.⁷⁵

Barenaked Ladies created the music video for “Enid” in July 1992 under the guidance of director Tim Hamilton. Filmed on a sound stage adorned with five small televisions hanging from the rafters and a gigantic projector screen centred on the backdrop, the video incorporated electronic media to broadcast pre-taped outdoor performance shots from Toronto’s Kensington Market and St. James Park, as well as stylized studio portraits of band members. Multisized iterations of a Pepsi-esque tricoloured circle emblem from the album cover for *Gordon* dominated the entire set,

⁷⁵ “Barenaked Ladies.” Sire Records Publicity Photograph. Canada: Sire Records, 1992. Courtesy of musicobsession.musicstack.com. In the photograph, from left to right, appear Andy Creeggan, Tyler Stewart, Ed Robertson, Jim Creeggan, and Steven Page.

leaving no doubt that this video functioned as a promotional advertisement for the LP.⁷⁶ Most of the four-minute commercial featured Barenaked Ladies pretending to play “Enid.” Hamilton often cut the film while keeping the camera stationary, allowing him to make the musicians appear, disappear, and reappear within a single shot. The group wore similar middle-class boyish outfits that included sensible shoes with white socks, baggy Bermuda shorts, and a short-sleeve shirt of some kind. Barenaked Ladies infused comedy throughout the video for “Enid” by making funny faces, gesticulating exaggeratedly, and pulling outright gags, such as having Tyler Stewart eat a sub sandwich instead of executing a conspicuous drum fill. The band’s clothing choices and body language bolstered its reputation as a bunch of happy-go-lucky suburban misfits.

Barenaked Ladies carefully catered its visual identity through the video for “Enid.” Steven Page confided that the ensemble designed its nerdy image:

I’ve never been embarrassed about being a goofy teenager from Scarborough. A geek. For me, that has always been a really fun way to put the idea of a band across, because most bands try so hard to be cool or sexy or suave. It seemed like a good idea for us to take advantage of the whole undiscovered realm of geekness or geekdom.⁷⁷

Page embraced his status as a young social outcast. The band’s self-effacing attitude and love of caricature subverted the rigidities of poseur posturing. Barenaked Ladies, however, hardly discovered the musical “realm of geekness.” Since the groundbreaking days of the Modern Lovers in the early 1970s, a long line of “alternative quirksters” has run through rock music history.⁷⁸ Barenaked Ladies, especially the two self-confessed

⁷⁶ This red, white, and blue striped emblem represented a small sponge ball used for children’s athletics.

⁷⁷ Brad Oswald, “Wacky but Earnest: Zany, Irreverent Barenaked Ladies Blend Social Satire with Skilled Voices,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, 4 September 1992, sec. Weekend.

⁷⁸ American culture scholar Iain Ellis placed Barenaked Ladies in historical context: “The Talking Heads and Orange Juice picked up the Lovers’ baton in the late 1970s, passing it on to alternative quirksters like King Missile and They Might Be Giants in the eighties, then on to emo godfathers Weezer and indie-pop

overweight frontmen, challenged the norms of embodied authenticity in Canada at the time. The five young men in the geeky group did not meet the traditional requirements for rock hunkdom and they knew it.⁷⁹ Yet, despite bearing supposed social and corporeal shortcomings, Barenaked Ladies still attracted thousands of adoring teenage fans to its Canadian concerts in 1992 and 1993.

Barenaked Ladies adopted a pragmatic approach to its publicity of *Gordon*. By the time Sire released the LP internationally in late July 1992, the band risked overexposure in the Golden Horseshoe market. To avoid that perilous pitfall, the group celebrated the Canadian launch of *Gordon* in Vancouver, British Columbia; much to the chagrin of the Toronto sound recording business community. Soon thereafter, Barenaked Ladies turned its efforts toward the United States, conducting a two-week promotional tour along the west coast on a busy show-per-night schedule. The ensemble played a few select concerts in Canada during late August and early September to crowds of several thousand high school and college-aged kids per gig. Meanwhile, sales of *Gordon* skyrocketed across the country, reaching triple platinum status by the end of October.⁸⁰ The quintet had become a *bona fide* national phenomenon. In December 1992, Barenaked Ladies, in conjunction with MCA Concerts, announced one of the most comprehensive and extensive Canadian tours ever conceived, which included several places not normally serviced by major acts. The band planned to play forty-five cities between the middle of

geeks Barenaked Ladies in the nineties, before landing in the hands of new-millennium nutters like Art Brut and the Rebel.” Iain Ellis, *Rebels Wit Attitude: Subversive Rock Humorists* (Berkeley: Soft Skull Press, 2008), 151–152.

⁷⁹ Lynn Saxberg, “Salad Days for the Ladies; This Group of Geeks Has It All. A Multi-Platinum Debut Album, Sold-out Concerts and Tens of Thousands of Adoring Teenagers for Fans,” *The Ottawa Citizen*, 3 April 1993, sec. Entertainment.

⁸⁰ “Gold/Platinum,” *Music Canada*, accessed 21 July 2016, <http://musiccanada.com/gold-platinum>.

February and the end of May 1993, from Victoria, British Columbia to St. John's, Newfoundland and Yellowknife, Northwest Territories to Windsor, Ontario.

In January 1993, a little more than a year after the Toronto City Hall controversy, Barenaked Ladies found itself embroiled in yet another dispute over “political correctness.” This time, though, the ensemble grappled with Indigenous trappers living in the Mackenzie River watershed region over a line from one of the band's earliest and most well-known compositions, “If I Had \$1000000.” In the middle of the country-flavoured sing-along piece, after proposing several eccentric purchases he would make with such a fortune, Ed Robertson suggested, “If I had a million dollars, I'd buy you a fur coat.” To which Steven Page responded, “But not a real fur coat – that's cruel.”⁸¹ Métis and Dene leaders in the Northwest Territories felt that this part of the song attacked traditional Indigenous lifeways and threatened a significant source of income for thousands of trappers.⁸² They had good reason to be on edge. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, the anti-fur movement flourished in Canada. People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, a powerful American animal rights organization, started its memorable “Rather Go Naked Than Wear Fur” campaign in 1991, helping reduce the overall demand for pelts, and further alienating Indigenous peoples from the land. Gary Bohnet, president of the Northwest Territory Métis Nation, strongly urged Barenaked Ladies to change the offending lyrics and author a supportive statement about trapping before its sold-out concert in Yellowknife on 28 February 1993.

The acoustic quintet became aware of the controversy while on tour in Britain, after receiving a fax from a Canadian news agency seeking comment. Aghast, Barenaked

⁸¹ To view the lyrics for “If I Had \$1000000” by Barenaked Ladies, see Appendix 5.6.

⁸² “Native Groups Upset with Barenaked Ladies' Lyrics,” *The Chronicle Herald*, 13 January 1993, sec. Entertainment.

Ladies sat down and carved out a carefully worded press release that explained the song in question constituted a satire of simplistic reactions to issues as complex as the debate over the use of animal pelts. It continued:

We understand that fur has played a major role in our country's heritage and that it is still a vital facet of many people's livelihood and traditions. All members of our band do eat meat and wear leather, however, our personal choice is to draw the line at fur, especially as a statement of wealth."⁸³

The group signalled that it grasped the complexity of the issue, but steadfastly refused to take the antagonizing line out of "If I Had \$1000000." Barenaked Ladies typified anti-fur movement supporters in Canada: White, middle class, urban southerners who confidently equated fur coats with animal cruelty for progressive political reasons. Born and raised in suburban Toronto, the members of the ensemble had spent almost their entire lives within the confines of industrial society. Gary Bohnet, seemingly appreciative of this fact, invited Barenaked Ladies to join him on a trap line when the band's tour reached Yellowknife. "I'd love to turn this around and make it into a positive thing," the Métis leader said hopefully.⁸⁴ The resulting meeting with Bohnet and other Indigenous trappers enlightened the quintet. "I would rather side with these people (the natives) and their cause than with some really easy statement, some kind of political statement," Steven Page revealed afterward. "I know these people feel very passionately about what they do, and I know they're sensible – they have respect for animals and respect for the land."⁸⁵ Barenaked Ladies realized its well-intentioned "politically correct" stance on furs missed the mark, though the ensemble ultimately kept the offending line intact.

⁸³ Kate Taylor, "Metis Protest Rock Band's Anti-Fur Line: Barenaked Ladies Says It's Just a Satire," *The Globe and Mail*, 12 January 1993, sec. Entertainment.

⁸⁴ "Barenaked Trappers?," *The Edmonton Journal*, 13 January 1993, sec. Editorial.

⁸⁵ Peter Howell, "Take Away a Man's Skor Bars, Pop Tarts and Cheesies," *The Toronto Star*, 1 April 1993, sec. Entertainment.

Barenaked Ladies' sweeping cross-country tour, entitled Mr. Rockin's All-You-Can-Eat-Salad-Bar, comprised one of the highlights of 1993's Canadian concert scene. Every single show sold out of tickets, nearly all within hours. The overwhelming response delighted the band. Despite the staggering consumer demand, most of the gigs transpired in mid-sized soft-seat theatres, which the group felt made for a better musical performance than gigantic arenas. "In soft-seaters, a larger spectrum of moods can go on in there, from real bashing to real emotional stuff that a stadium can't have." Ed Robertson explained.⁸⁶ Barenaked Ladies spared no expense on its stage presentation for the massive tour. The set resembled a cartoonish Scarborough basement recreational room, complete with garish drapes and tassels, jumbo lampshades, and three large picture frames hung topsy-turvy. Tyler Stewart's drum kit rested on an oversized table. Andy Creeggan nestled his piano on a huge couch while Jim Creeggan propped his double bass up on a giant sofa. A big-time, high-powered laser and light show illuminated the ensemble's actions each night. Plus, inside the disarranged picture frames, projection screens flashed images of fresh veggies and prairie sunsets, as well as linguistic messages – an idea cribbed from U2's ongoing Zoo TV Tour – including directives to eat more junk food and carefully timed malapropisms.

Mr. Rockin's All-You-Can-Eat-Salad-Bar tour attracted tons of positive press coverage in Canada. Music journalists who reviewed one of these concerts often spoke highly of the group's two young frontmen, Steven Page and Ed Robertson. Nick Krewen, for instance, commented: "Page – even when he's dancing, hopping and leaping like a madman – is a very confident and competent tenor, while Robertson tore off a couple of

⁸⁶ Mick Gzowski, "Salad Days Are Here Again with Ladies' Tour," *The Vancouver Sun*, 11 February 1993, sec. Entertainment.

difficult-to-execute Alex Lifeson licks for the Rush diversion during the satirical romp, ‘Grade 9.’”⁸⁷ The pair’s talent impressed Krewen greatly. In the back, drummer Tyler Stewart pounded out everything from folk to rap. The Creeggan brothers broadened the beat with Andy’s piano and occasional conga complementing the thumping of Jim’s stand-up acoustic bass. Several critics argued that this three-part rhythm section formed the cornerstone of the quintet’s sound. Barenaked Ladies peppered its shows with comedic moments as Page and Robertson attempted to outwit and out pun each other, plumbing Anglo-American pop culture for their references. Still, by and large, music journalists thought the band demonstrated enough weighty artistry to prove itself more than just a novelty act. “They were goofy,” Stephen Ostick conceded, “but musically they remain totally convincing and unlike anything you’ve ever heard.”⁸⁸ Ostick ascribed communal authenticity to the group for manifesting credible, original musicianship during its live performance.

Critics also scrutinized the composition and conduct of ticket holders at each Barenaked Ladies show to determine if collective communication flowed between the ensemble and the audience. Music journalists noted that clean-cut teenagers permeated the crowd, and brash young women constituted the largest contingent of those assembled. Anglophones represented a vast majority of the group’s fans, including folks who hailed from Québec.⁸⁹ Concert reviews routinely described how crowd members enthusiastically danced and swayed, singing along to every familiar tune. Audience participation peaked when Barenaked Ladies played “If I Had \$1000000.” In a scene

⁸⁷ Nick Krewen, “Barenaked Fever; The Ladies Excel at Their Craft,” *The Hamilton Spectator*, 31 May 1993, sec. Now.

⁸⁸ Stephen Ostick, “The Ladies Are Credible,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, 9 March 1993, sec. Entertainment.

⁸⁹ Alain Brunet, “Barenaked Ladies: Rien de moins que le ‘meilleur groupe au pays,’” *La Presse*, 15 April 1993, sec. Sortir.

transplanted right out of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, hundreds of ticket holders pelted the quintet with boxes of Kraft Dinner as soon as it referred to the fluorescent orange processed food during the popular anthem, covering the stage and several fellow fans with the macaroni-and-cheese staple in the process. Music journalists differed in their opinions of the cheering throngs of teens. Most critics lauded the behaviour of concertgoers, finding it indicative of communal authenticity. Peter Howell, on the other hand, suggested that the audience's deafening "squeals" illustrated a lack of music appreciation, which prevented the manifestation of a genuine rock show.⁹⁰ Howell's critique presented young women as incapable of truly appreciating rock.

Gordon turned Barenaked Ladies into the latest Canadian popular music phenomenon. A little more than a year after its release, the LP reached septuple platinum status in Canada, making it, by far, the best-selling debut album by a domestic sound recording artist ever.⁹¹ The band had consciously tried to construct a record that would appeal to the most people possible.⁹² Folkloric authenticity did not really factor into the equation. Subsequently, in a few short months, these five independent suburban geeks became completely and utterly mainstreamed. Such meteoric success meant the group had to relinquish its claims to alternative or marginal status. At the same time, a significant backlash developed in Toronto among former supporters of Barenaked Ladies. Many underground rockers once drawn by the sly irony of the quintet's "five fat guys from Scarborough" nerd routine now slagged the band hard for selling out. "The group we've obviously lost is the alternative community," Steven Page conceded with a sigh,

⁹⁰ Peter Howell, "Barenaked Ladies and Fans Have a Ball," *The Toronto Star*, 2 April 1993, sec. Entertainment.

⁹¹ "Gold/Platinum," *Music Canada*, accessed 21 July 2016, <http://musiccanada.com/gold-platinum>.

⁹² Howell, "Take Away a Man's Skor Bars, Pop Tarts and Cheesies."

greatly upset at the prospect. “And that is a drag in a lot of ways, because I think that’s who I identify with still. I’ve always considered myself part of that alternative community – it’s the music and culture and films I’ve grown up with. A lot of them hate us now, just hate us.”⁹³ Page struggled reconciling Barenaked Ladies’ widespread commercial success with his indie roots. The loss of folkloric authenticity in the eyes of his hometown peers stung heavily. Be that as it may, by the spring of 1993, despite an incredibly strong run in Canada, *Gordon* had only sold about 40,000 units in the United States.⁹⁴ Not exactly the introduction that the band envisioned down there. Still, Barenaked Ladies remained content in the knowledge that building an audience in America usually took several years.

Another Roadside Attraction

In late January 1992, when asked what The Tragically Hip’s eagerly anticipated upcoming album might sound like, bassist Gord Sinclair responded: “It’s going to have more of an aggressive edge than either *Road Apples* or *Up To Here*. I think we’re moving in that direction a little more. Certainly not metal or anything like that, but we’re playing harder, playing a little more complex these days.”⁹⁵ Sinclair predicted the band’s third LP with MCA Records would suit the new, heavier, post-Nirvana era. The Tragically Hip hired veteran British producer Chris Tsangarides, who had worked with some of the major hard rock acts in the music business, to help the group capture on tape the “aggressive edge” it wanted. The Kingston quintet brought fifteen collaboratively crafted

⁹³ Peter Howell, “Are Ladies ‘Calling Their Own Bluff?’,” *The Toronto Star*, 1 April 1993, sec. Entertainment.

⁹⁴ Stephen Ostick, “Paying the Price of Fame,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, 7 March 1993, sec. Entertainment.

⁹⁵ “Tragically Hip Plotting More Aggressive Sound,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, 29 January 1992, sec. Entertainment.

and road-tested songs to the recording session, which transpired over six weeks at Battery Studios in London, England that July and August. At the behest of Tsangarides, the band dramatically altered its method of cutting tracks. “Traditionally, we’ve had this ‘off-the-floor’ way of making albums,” lead guitarist Rob Baker explained. “We’d pushed that ‘live’ feel about as far as we could, so we decided to treat this record as a studio production and approach it in terms of a different medium.”⁹⁶ The Tragically Hip finally used the studio as a platform distinct from the stage, embracing sophisticated recording techniques and sound effects to manifest another kind of effervescence. Tsangarides had the ensemble lay down the basic bed tracks for every song and then built up each tune separately, adding layers of instrumentation and vocals to it piecemeal. The producer implemented strictly scheduled working hours that gave the ensemble nights and weekends off. “To tell you the truth it was the most boring record to make,” drummer Johnny Fay confided later on. “When we were in the studio it was fun but the down time in London was brutal. We were living in London, a city of 13 million people, bored to tears with nothing to do.”⁹⁷ Lacking local acquaintances to entertain or guide them, the Kingston natives struggled with ennui. In the end, this overseas isolation served to strengthen the bonds between band members.

The Tragically Hip finished recording its third LP in August 1992, causing a bit of a scramble for MCA Records to get the album packaged and ready by the early October release date. Giving the record a title constituted one of the last tasks the band had to finish. For the first time, the group chose the appellation of a song, “Fully Completely,” for the name. “Titling the album is one of the hardest things for us,” Rob

⁹⁶ Neil Hawkins, “As Hip As They Wanna Be,” *Top Forty Focus*, December 1992.

⁹⁷ David Howell, “Tragically Hip’s next Album May Be the Best One yet,” *The Edmonton Journal*, 30 July 1993, sec. Entertainment.

Baker revealed about the Kingston quintet. “We always shied away from (using a song title) in the past because we were worried it puts too much emphasis on that one song. This time – well, I don’t think we wanted people to look to that song for special meaning but I think that if they do, the song stands up.”⁹⁸ The Tragically Hip’s “Fully Completely” revolved around a simple bass riff by Gord Sinclair. Drummer Johnny Fay accentuated the groove with a mid-tempo backbeat rhythm. Meanwhile, Paul Langlois strummed the chord progression on his electric guitar as lead axeman Baker added some tasty licks in both call and response. Gordon Downie’s signature vocals established the melody and tone of the track. Verse by verse the song swelled toward a pounding hard rock crescendo. The lyrics for “Fully Completely” functioned in a marriage with the music, but, as words alone, they described a sort of intangible paradox that Downie believed existed in everyone all the time: namely, finding oneself caught, suspended, between the endlessness of the universe and the infinity concealed in particular forms.⁹⁹ To convey that self-contradictory feeling, Downie reinterpreted some of Milan Kundera’s thoughts in *The Book of Laughter And Forgetting*.¹⁰⁰ Understanding the intertextuality of the Kingston quintet’s enigmatic album title provides some insight into its possible meanings.

Critical reception of The Tragically Hip’s *Fully Completely* proved mixed. Many Canadian music journalists issued rave reviews. “With this disc, the band has clinched its

⁹⁸ Lynn Saxberg, “The Tragically Hip; Canada’s Top Rock Band Discovers Winning Formula with Third Album,” *The Ottawa Citizen*, 12 November 1992, sec. City Lights.

⁹⁹ To view the lyrics for The Tragically Hip’s “Fully Completely,” see Appendix 5.7.

¹⁰⁰ Czech author Milan Kundera wrote: “While pondering the infinity of the stars, we ignore the infinity of our father.” Milan Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, trans. Michael Henry Heim, (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1980), 7. In “Fully Completely,” Gordon Downie transformed that particular line into: “I ponder the endlessness of the stars, ignoring said same of my father.”

position as Canada's top rockers," Lynn Saxberg declared.¹⁰¹ Almost as often, however, critics expressed a particular sense of disappointment with the Kingston quintet's third LP. "For another, lesser band, *Fully Completely* might well be a triumph," Gerry Krochak pointed out. "But The Tragically Hip has raised our expectations – we anticipate more from this band than mere competence. But that's about all we get."¹⁰² Krochak, and other scribes of a similar frame of mind, found the album unsatisfactorily sufficient. Specifically, *Fully Completely*'s slick and polished production dismayed them. The discourse of sonic authenticity held that real rock music sounded naturally raw, as opposed to artificially refined. Music journalist Stephen Ostick foresaw Chris Tsangarides putting rougher edges on The Tragically Hip's already tough and punchy twin-electric guitar tone. "But this is the smoothest-sounding collection the band has yet released," he complained.¹⁰³ Ostick felt let down by the LP's glossier finish, taking it as a distasteful breach of sonic authenticity.

Critics all noticed that a third of the songs on *Fully Completely* explored bits of Canadian history: covering such disparate figures as colonial explorer Jacques Cartier; distinguished novelist Hugh MacLennan; criminal justice system victim David Milgaard; and fabled Toronto Maple Leafs defenceman Bill Barilko. The Tragically Hip seemed unafraid to mix domestic social issues with its electric guitar-driven rock during a period of intense national political turmoil. The band released *Fully Completely* days before Canada conducted a public referendum on the Charlottetown Accord, a bundle of

¹⁰¹ Lynn Saxberg, "Eat Your Heart out Seattle - The Hip Is Hot," *The Ottawa Citizen*, 10 October 1992, sec. Entertainment.

¹⁰² Gerry Krochak, "Like a Purgin': New Madonna Album Bad Euro-Disco Rehash," *The Leader-Post*, 2 November 1992, sec. What's On: Albums. Reporters echoed this criticism in: Stephen Ostick, "Tragically Hip LP on Platinum Climb," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 10 October 1992, sec. Entertainment; Chris Dafoe, "The Hip Sway to Southern Fatalism: POP," *The Globe and Mail*, 19 October 1992, sec. Entertainment.

¹⁰³ Ostick, "Tragically Hip LP on Platinum Climb."

constitutional amendments meant to reconcile a fractured nation. In October 1992, widespread disaffection threatened to pull the country apart, both figuratively and literally. The Charlottetown Accord attempted to resolve a number of enduring disputes, including Canada's colonial legacy and the division of powers under the federal system.¹⁰⁴ Canadians passionately deliberated the merits of all the projected constitutional amendments for a few months before ultimately deciding to reject them by a significant margin.¹⁰⁵

The Tragically Hip offered Canadian consumers rock music that ostensibly addressed their national identity instead of Americans' and, as a result, stoked the fires of patriotism. The band denied that any sort of grand nationalistic scheme inspired the development of *Fully Completely*. "People ask, 'Did you set out to create a Canadiana kind of thing?' but it's been inadvertent," explained Gord Sinclair. "We didn't intend to, but there is so much focus on what is happening in our nation that you can't help it. You write about what you know."¹⁰⁶ Gordon Downie, who finalized all the lyrics for the album during the band's last week at Battery Studios, told members of the Canadian music press in November 1992 that he felt particularly homesick while recording *Fully*

¹⁰⁴ The Charlottetown Accord proposed enshrining the right of Indigenous peoples to self-government in the Canadian Constitution, establishing First Nations as a quasi-independent order of rule. It also promised to bring Québec into the statutory fold by way of the "Canada Clause" – part of which recognized the francophone province as a distinct society within the country – and House of Commons seat allocation reform. Some of the most vociferous opposition to the package of legal measures found expression through a couple of recently launched political parties. Asserting itself as the new voice of western discontent, the Reform Party of Canada battled against, among other things, awarding Québec special status within the federation. The sovereigntist Bloc Québécois, contrarily, rallied against the Accord because it did not grant *la belle province* sufficient jurisdiction.

¹⁰⁵ On 26 October 1992, the "No" side of the Canadian referendum received 54.4% of the vote, whereas the "Yes" side obtained only 44.6% of the tally. David Leyton-Brown, ed., *Canadian Annual Review of Politics and Public Affairs, 1992* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 27.

¹⁰⁶ Tom Harrison, "They're Hip but Canadian: Band Evokes Echoes of Medieval Painters," *The Province*, 2 December 1992, sec. Showcase.

Completely overseas in England.¹⁰⁷ Perhaps an intense bout of nostalgia encouraged Downie to pay homage to what he imagined constituted Canadian heritage, legends, and lore? Or maybe these lyrics spawned from a keen sense of the historically turbulent period that Canada found itself going through? Whatever the motivation may have been, the deployment of several ideologically charged identifiers throughout *Fully Completely* enabled people across the country to associate The Tragically Hip with “Canadian-ness” – which, as English scholar Douglas Ivison made clear, “is not an essential quality but something that is always partial and contested, and always already in transition.”¹⁰⁸ The Kingston quintet’s “Canadian-ness,” therefore, comprised an effect of Downie’s lyrical practice, not its cause.

Nevertheless, some of the most prominent music critics in the country regarded The Tragically Hip’s “Canadian-ness” as an abiding, fixed characteristic: one easily identifiable by the sprinkling of Canadian references that punctuated *Fully Completely*.¹⁰⁹ This type of media coverage treated “Canadian-ness” as the steady impetus for the group’s lyrical choices, and, in the process, conflated nationality with gender, race, place, and other significant markers of identity held in common by the Kingston quintet.

Understanding The Tragically Hip as fundamentally or quintessentially representative of Canada meant that a particular constellation of masculinity, Whiteness, and residency in

¹⁰⁷ Tim Arsenault, “The Tragically Hip: Fully Completely, Honest Hard Rock,” *The Chronicle Herald*, 12 November 1992, sec. Thursday!

¹⁰⁸ Douglas Ivison, “Canadian Content: Cultural Specificity in English-Canadian Popular Music,” in *Canadian Cultures and Globalization: Selected Proceedings of the 23rd Annual Conference of the Association for Canadian Studies, Held at Brock University, 1-3 June 1996*, ed. Joy Cohnstaedt and Yves Frenette (Montréal: Association for Canadian Studies, 1997), 52.

¹⁰⁹ The author observed this line of reasoning in: Peter Howell, “Band’s Fully Completely Hip,” *The Toronto Star*, 16 October 1992, sec. Entertainment; Mark Lepage, “Tragically Hip Wave No Flags; Canada’s Toughest Rockers Unveil New Album,” *The Gazette*, 5 November 1992, sec. Entertainment; Arsenault, “The Tragically Hip: Fully Completely, Honest Hard Rock”; Lynn Saxberg, “The Tragically Hip; Canada’s Top Rock Band Discovers Winning Formula with Third Album,” *The Ottawa Citizen*, 12 November 1992, sec. City Lights; Mackie, “Hockey Puck Rock.”

the English-speaking Lake Ontario region became the standard against which critics measured all other bodies and locations in the country. Certain music journalists thus normalized, naturalized, and privileged, the experiences and perspectives of an Anglo-rock band from the Limestone City at a time when the future of the Canadian state seemed terribly uncertain.

In October 1992, The Tragically Hip released “Locked in the Trunk of a Car” as the first single from *Fully Completely*. The tune began with Johnny Fay playing a lilting mid-tempo pattern on his ride cymbal for a few beats before Gord Sinclair and Rob Baker jumped in. Sinclair established the simple harmonic progression on his bass while Baker delivered some restrained melodic finger picking on his electric guitar. Soon thereafter, Gordon Downie started relaying soft, soothing vocal lines that brought the minute-long opening section of “Locked in the Trunk of a Car” to a head. The Tragically Hip then launched into one of its trademark grooves characterized by zealous twin-guitar interplay and a thumping rock beat, which continued along unabated, save for a brief re-intro passage near the end of the tune. Downie’s singing performance became increasingly acerbic as he belted out darkly oblique lyrics that skipped pertinent details and encouraged listeners to imaginatively fill in the spaces. Yet, when Canadian music journalists lent an ear to the single, several picked up a strong sense of doom, death, and evil slithering through the lead singer’s abstruse phrases. Critics figured “Locked in the Trunk of a Car” detailed the actions of a habitual murderer.¹¹⁰ That interpretation distressed Downie, who never intended such a homicidal reading of his lyrics. “I meant the song not as a kind of anthem for the serial killer,” he made clear, “but as a metaphor for lost love and that sort of feeling of a loveless person, and the yearning for something

¹¹⁰ To view the lyrics for The Tragically Hip’s “Locked in the Trunk of a Car,” see Appendix 5.8.

else.”¹¹¹ Downie’s deliberately ambiguous words enabled multiple understandings to flourish, some of which alarmed the band’s lyricist. Nonetheless, The Tragically Hip’s “Locked in the Trunk of a Car” did rather well as a single in Canada. It reached number eleven on the *RPM* 100 Hot Tracks chart in mid December 1992, matching “Little Bones” as the quintet’s top ranked radio hit.



Image 5.4: The Tragically Hip promotional photograph from 1992.¹¹²

The Tragically Hip used the music video for “Locked in the Trunk of a Car” to manage its image. The group trusted director Peter Henderson to bring together a visual identity for the ensemble that conformed to the discourse of embodied authenticity in

¹¹¹ Peter Howell, “Tragically Hip’s Postcard from the Edge,” *The Toronto Star*, 22 July 1993, sec. Entertainment.

¹¹² “The Tragically Hip.” MCA Records Canada Publicity Photograph. Canada: MCA Records Canada, 1992. Library and Archives Canada, *RPM fonds*. <http://collectionscanada.gc.ca> (accessed 14 January 2017).

1992. Henderson created a black and white video in which screen time rapidly switched between lively shots of individual band members feigning performances separately in an enhanced sound stage setting and a number of illustrative clips that offered an ominous take on the song's lyrical content. The Tragically Hip's casual attire and scruffy, unkempt look signalled to viewers that the band cared more about making skilful music than being fashionable. Henderson reinforced this workmanlike image by capturing each musician with favourable mid shots and close-ups that emphasized their distinctive rock ability and collective authorship of "Locked in the Trunk of a Car." In doing so, he organized a strong bid for embodied authenticity. The narrative element of the extended commercial recounted the harrowing ordeal of a man imprisoned in the trunk of a car as it travelled the wheat-lined dirt roads of the Albertan prairie countryside. Music journalist Peter Howell, referencing a multiple Oscar-winning 1991 American film about serial killers, described the video as "a *Silence Of The Lambs*-style depiction of an abduction and murder."¹¹³ This characterization appears somewhat hyperbolic. While the band's advertisement strongly hinted at a nefarious plot, the extended commercial contained no bloodshed. Still, critics commonly interpreted the video for "Locked in the Trunk of a Car" as a filmic representation of the White male serial killer. Through a combination of motion pictures and lyrics, the video reinforced associations of White heterosexual masculinity with an empty, depleted identity that, in compulsive murderers, produced a chain of violent acts meant to gain an illusive subjectivity.¹¹⁴

¹¹³ Peter Howell, "Tragically Hip Wins 3 Video Awards," *The Toronto Star*, 1 October 1993, sec. Entertainment.

¹¹⁴ Nicola Rehling, "Everyman and No Man: White, Heterosexual Masculinity in Contemporary Serial Killer Movies," *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media*, no. 49 (Spring 2007).

On 8 October 1992, tickets for The Tragically Hip's twelve-city national tour in support of *Fully Completely* went on sale across Canada. Every date sold out by the end of that day, from the opener in Moncton, New Brunswick to the finale in Vancouver, British Columbia.¹¹⁵ Consumer demand in Canada for the Kingston quintet had reached a feverish pitch. Canadian music press coverage of The Tragically Hip's three-week string of gigs during the late fall proved remarkably laudatory. "Rowdy and melodic, intelligent and poetic, capable of galvanizing a crowd into a spontaneous singalong at the end of their first riff, rock bands anywhere don't get much better than The Tragically Hip," critic Helen Metella concluded, after catching the group live in Edmonton, Alberta.¹¹⁶ Metella ascribed communal authenticity to the show because the quintet demonstrated superior musical abilities and provoked voluntary audience participation. On stage, The Tragically Hip's high-quality sound system, subdued lighting, and simple artistic backdrop all suited its quest for substance before style. Music journalists found the ensemble's performances well rehearsed and tight, especially the grinding electric guitar interplay. "Guitarists [Rob] Baker and Paul Langlois displayed an organic understanding of their roles, with Langlois churning through the bedrock of the songs as Baker put the edge on them," Marc LePage observed.¹¹⁷ The collective communication displayed between the pair, and the rest of the band members, packed considerable emotional clout for LePage. Still, frontman Gordon Downie remained the focus of The Tragically Hip's live show. Critics thought his bright banter, peculiar bodily mannerisms, and growling voice made him the

¹¹⁵ Harrison, "They're Hip but Canadian: Band Evokes Echoes of Medieval Painters."

¹¹⁶ Helen Metella, "Tragically Hip Takes Crowd to Stratospheric Heights," *The Edmonton Journal*, 29 November 1992, sec. Entertainment.

¹¹⁷ Mark LePage, "Tragically Hip Wipe Away Canadian Rock's Mediocrity," *The Gazette*, 15 November 1992, sec. Entertainment.

ideal rock lead singer.¹¹⁸ Each night on the *Fully Completely* national tour crowds of 2000 to 6000 mostly young men became a throbbing, chanting legion of ungovernable humanity, dedicated to revelling with abandon. Multiple encores usually put an end to the festivities, and exhausted fans slowly exited the auditorium. Music journalists left convinced they had just witnessed a genuine rock concert.

In the summer of 1993, The Tragically Hip launched an ambitious mobile rock festival called Another Roadside Attraction, after the 1971 seriocomic novel by American Tom Robbins, which visited eight cities across Canada in a little over three weeks. The Kingston quintet shared the stage with some of its favourite recording artists from around the globe: Midnight Oil, Hothouse Flowers, World Party, Pere Ubu, Daniel Lanois, and a handful of other respected acts. Despite several obvious similarities, The Tragically Hip denied that Another Roadside Attraction constituted a Canadian rip-off of Lollapalooza, the recently established and hugely successful travelling alternative music and cultural festival out of the United States. “We’re not trying to ape Lollapalooza and create some kind of microcosmic alternative culture,” Gord Sinclair made clear. “We’re just trying to create a day of good music.”¹¹⁹ To that end, Sinclair and the other band members, aided by Mark Norman of Perryscope Concerts, put together a bill stocked with performers who had demonstrated the ability to deliver a quality live show. Music journalists in Canada covered Another Roadside Attraction extensively and nearly all of them thought the festival lived up to its potential, in spades. “Each and every act was hot, and Midnight Oil and the Hip were absolutely on fire, turning in the summer’s best performances,”

¹¹⁸ See, for instance: Elizabeth Renzetti, “What’s Not to Love about Tragically Hip,” *The Globe and Mail*, 20 November 1992, sec. Entertainment.

¹¹⁹ Tom Harrison, “A Day of Good Music: It’s Also The Tragically Hip Saying Their Thanks,” *The Province*, 16 July 1993, sec. Preview.

John Mackie declared.¹²⁰ The Tragically Hip played to about 17,000 people per night, making this Canadian tour the group's biggest one to date.

Another Roadside Attraction featured a political edge. As with its literary namesake, the festival encouraged young people to consider alternative forms of living and the possibility of change. Midnight Oil's lead singer, Peter Garrett, set the tone for the tour, addressing 2,000 anti-logging protesters at Clayoquot Sound, British Columbia, days before the series of gigs even started. In comparison, The Tragically Hip appeared a bit out of its depth. "It's made us feel modestly uncomfortable that we haven't done much along those lines in the past," Gord Sinclair admitted. "But, at the same time, we're not Midnight Oil. We haven't even built our soapbox yet, let alone figured out what to talk about once we get on it."¹²¹ Feeling inspired, The Tragically Hip took the lead from its Australian counterpart and started broaching social issues. Most critical reviews of Another Roadside Attraction noted a change in Gordon Downie's on stage commentary. "It was the dawn of a new political Downie," music journalist Peter Howell observed, "as he called for environmental activism and dedicated his song 'Courage' as an attack on [Ontario] Premier Bob Rae."¹²² The Kingston quintet showed a propensity, however underdeveloped, to vocalize pressing concerns. Concertgoers also received political messaging from the mobile festival's tertiary attractions, including informational booths for Amnesty International, Greenpeace, and the Animal Defence League of Canada.

¹²⁰ John Mackie, "Lucky Seabird Crowd Heard the Summer's Best," *The Vancouver Sun*, 19 July 1993, sec. Entertainment.

¹²¹ "Another Roadside Attraction More than Just Another Tour," *The Edmonton Journal*, 22 July 1993, sec. Entertainment.

¹²² Peter Howell, "Tragically Hip Win Moshers' Airborne Approval," *The Toronto Star*, 25 July 1993, sec. Entertainment.

The Tragically Hip's *Fully Completely* became a runaway commercial success in Canada. It achieved platinum status there in three short weeks of release and continued to sell well over the following year, reaching sales of 500,000 units by November 1993.¹²³ This substantial domestic backing enabled the band to embark upon several road trips across the United States and as far afield as Europe and Australia to develop support internationally. The ensemble followed a slow, steady course, sacrificing continued big paydays at home for low-paying, sparsely attended gigs elsewhere in hopes of gaining widespread recognition abroad.¹²⁴ The business strategy started to pay off a little in America, where The Tragically Hip sold more than 100,000 copies of *Fully Completely* in the first half of 1993.¹²⁵ Yet, for Gordon Downie, the more he thought about what his job entailed, the more he despaired at the shallowness of rock stardom:

I've left some interviews feeling as though I've just had an enema, and they can feel good or bad, and I've left some and I've gotten very depressed, because I think, this is pointless, you know? When you think about what's going on in the world today, politically or environmentally, and sometimes they're both enmeshed, then talking about yourself is just so goddamned irresponsible. Talking about how you make records, or whether the band fights a lot, or how you got your name . . . and ultimately, all I'm doing is contributing to the mass of crap that's floating out there, the crap that people can read.¹²⁶

Aware of his pivotal role in furthering the superficial discourse about rock music in Canada, and cognizant of the significant problems facing humanity, Downie understood his heedless self-promotion as reckless and immoral. He articulated a reformulation of the discourse of folkloric authenticity, wherein the proper negotiation of neoliberal

¹²³ "Gold/Platinum," *Music Canada*, accessed 7 July 2016, <http://musiccanada.com/gold-platinum>.

¹²⁴ Stephen Ostick, "The Hip: Friends First, Workers Second, Rock Band Credits Loyal Canadian Fans with Foreign Success," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 20 November 1992, sec. Weekend.

¹²⁵ Maureen Littlejohn, "Locked in the Trunk of Gord Downie's Mind," *Network*, August 1993.

¹²⁶ Howell, "Tragically Hip's Postcard from the Edge."

industrial capitalism now entailed the social responsibility of environmental activism. The Tragically Hip believed the time for political neutrality on such matters had passed. This exchange highlights the dialogic nature of popular music. The Kingston quintet subverted the dominant political and economic ideology of neoliberalism in favour of an imagined alternative.

Conclusion

A shifting multifaceted discourse about authenticity governed the production and reception of rock music in the early 1990s, when alternative music moved from the margins to the mainstream in Canada. This chapter detailed how leading Canadian musicians and critics, through their words and actions, strongly associated rock music with heterosexuality, manliness, Whiteness, and residency in the English-speaking Lake Ontario region. Hegemonic understandings of gender and sexuality shaped expectations of audience composition and formulation of song lyrics. Whiteness functioned largely as an unarticulated presupposition: the discourse about authenticity generally took it for granted that White people made and consumed rock music. Meanwhile, exhibiting a sense of place gained even more currency as a marker of validity at the start of the 1990s. By tackling domestic political topics, sharing experiences of suburban popular culture, and lacing lyrical content with figures from Canadian history, leading rock bands both contributed to and reflected the growing importance of expressing a sense of place. In the case of The Tragically Hip, some influential music journalists equated the ensemble's regional sense of place with an essentialized notion of Canadian-ness. This chapter

attributed that heightened responsiveness to a surge of cultural nationalism spreading throughout Canada at the time.

This chapter also recounted how a diverse set of rock groups maintained some oppositional stances traditionally associated with the margins, despite occupying mainstream positions rife with complicity. Cowboy Junkies railed against the devastating effects of neoliberalism on rural Canada in “The Last Spike.” Blue Rodeo’s “Fools Like You” spoke strongly in favour of Indigenous land claims. Barenaked Ladies voiced a “politically correct” anti-fur position in “If I Had \$1000000.” The comedic quintet, however, adjusted its attitude after visiting with Indigenous trappers in the Mackenzie River watershed region. These three wildly different sounding tracks each expressed a spirit of resistance consistent with the political fringe. The Tragically Hip emerged, albeit somewhat hesitantly, in 1993 as a bunch of environmental activists, signalling its defiance of the status quo. Furthermore, all four bands examined in this chapter displayed oppositional stances in their music videos as well. Cowboy Junkies, Blue Rodeo, and The Tragically Hip each used film techniques in their postmodern advertisements that emphasized musical ability instead of visual appeal. Barenaked Ladies, in contradistinction to these “cool” roots rockers, developed and embraced a geeky image that celebrated its suburban social misfit heritage. When alternative music shifted from the margins to the mainstream in Canada during the early 1990s, its leading practitioners kept some of the oppositional posture associated with fringe elements.

Appendix 5.1: Lyrics for “Last Spike” by Cowboy Junkies

Mornings feel so damn sad these days
Without the call of the 8:15
That old familiar echo has finally died away
Leaving nothing but a chill
Where there once was a mighty scream

And I've watched the flat cars
Take away our timber
I've watched the coal cars steal our rock
And now that we've got
Nothing left to take we're told
That the wheels will stop turning
The whistles will stop blowing
These foolish dreams must stop

Last year they closed down the post office
Took the only flag we had in town
That old brick building still stands like a cenotaph
To a vision lost and buried in a very distant past

And I've watched the flat cars
Take away our timber
I've watched the coal cars steal our rock
And now that we've got
Nothing left to take we're told
That the wheels will stop turning
The whistles will stop blowing
These foolish dreams must stop

The longest train I've ever seen
Was the train that you were on
I walked you to the station
We kissed and you were gone
I dream at night about you coming home
The train in the station, your uniform on fire
As you step onto the platform
The band plays a little louder
And as we embrace your cap falls off
Oh, I guess these foolish dreams must stop

Mornings feel so damn sad these days
Without the call of the 8:15
Looks like this town is finally going to die away
Leaving nothing but broken promises

Where there once was small town dreams

And I've watched the flat cars
Take away our timber
I've watched the coal cars steal our rock
And now that we've got
Nothing left to take we're told
That the TV station will be closing
Main Street windows will need boarding
That these foolish dreams must stop

Appendix 5.2: Lyrics for “Southern Rain” by Cowboy Junkies

The flies have quit their buzzing
Even Bear has stopped his barking
They all sense something brewing
Up the James and headed this way

Bobby sips his morning coffee
Says ‘Have you finished with the funnies?’
Looks like a storm’s coming honey
Guess we’ll have to stay in bed today’

I’ve heard that into every life
A little of it must fall
If there’s any truth to the saying
Lord, let it be a southern rain

Marie was born in Macon, Georgia
She met a west coast lawyer
He plucked that sweet magnolia
And carried her to the hills of West L.A.

She says ‘I never thought I’d tire of a dollar
But this life has grown so hollow
Every night there’s lipstick on his collar
And every morning I wash it away’

She heard that into every life
A little of it must fall
So she spends her evenings praying
For a little of that southern rain

Cars alive on city streets
Of sparkling black water
Like waves beneath my window
Never break just roll away
Tonight, this rain will be my lullaby
These cars, my dreams
To carry me home to stay

The wipers beat a rhythm
Truck spray obscures my vision
But I’m closing in on my destination
Two more hours and I’ll be at your door

And it will never cease to amaze me

How a little rain can drive folks crazy
When I'd trade all my blue skies gladly
For your blue eyes, crooked smile
And a steady downpour

I've heard that into every life
A little of it must fall
But you'll never catch me complaining
About too much of that southern rain

Appendix 5.3: Lyrics for Blue Rodeo's "Fools Like You"

So good at doing
What you don't do
Just trying to protect yourself
And other fools like you
So well practiced
In your deceit
Behind the high walls of stupidity

Your endless conceit
Behind the locked door
The sleeping dog you beat
I hope I see the day
She satisfies her teeth

Give back to the native
Their treaty land
What you preach you preach for others
Why don't you practice that first hand

I just don't understand
This world of mine
I must be out of touch
Or out of my mind

And will the profits of destruction
Forever make your eyes blind
Do you bow to the corporations
Cause they pay their bills on time

God bless Elijah
With the feather in his hand
Stop stealing the Indian land
Stop stealing the Indian land
Stop stealing the Indian land

Appendix 5.4: Lyrics for Blue Rodeo's "Lost Together"

Strange and beautiful are the stars tonight
That dance around your head
In your eyes I see that perfect world
I hope that doesn't sound too weird

And I want all the world to know
That your love's all I need
All that I need

And if we're lost,
Then we are lost together
Yea if we're lost,
Then we are lost together

I stand before this faceless crowd
And wonder why I bother
So much controlled by so few,
Stumbling from one disaster to another

I've heard it all so many times before
It's all a dream to me now, a dream to me now

And if we're lost,
Then we are lost together
Yea if we're lost,
Then we are lost together

In the silence of this whispered night
I listen only to your breath
And in that second of a shooting star
Somehow it all makes sense

And I want all the world to know
That your love's all I need
All that I need

And if we're lost,
Then we are lost together
Yea if we're lost,
Then we are lost together

Appendix 5.5: Lyrics for “Enid” by Barenaked Ladies

The silence, the terror, the pain, the horror, as your mom comes downstairs.

Enid we never really knew each other anyway
Enid we never really knew each other anyway

It took me a year to believe it was over
And it took me two more to get over the loss, whoa whoa
I took a beating when you wrote me those letters
And every time I remembered the taste of your lip-gloss

Enid we never really knew each other anyway
Enid we never really knew each other anyway
Maybe we always saw right through each other anyway
But Enid we never really knew each other anyway

There were times when I wanted to hurt you
And there were times when I know that I did whoa whoa
There were times when I thought I would kill you
But can you blame me I was only a kid
Now tell me why we never respected each other
And tell me why I never believed that you were a person too
I always thought that you fancied my brother
I may not have liked it, oh but memory is a strange thing, oh, and Enid?
Enid I remember you

Enid we never really knew each other anyway
Enid we never really knew each other anyway
Maybe we always saw right through each other anyway
But Enid we never really knew each other anyway

It took me a year to believe it was over
Ohh and it took me two more to get over the loss
I took a beating when I wrote you those letters
And every time you told me to get lost

Now it's not fair to say that it's
'Cause I was three inches shorter then
And it's not fair to say that it's 'cause
I was only fifteen years old
But maybe it's fair to say it was a lack of communication
I took a phone message, oh and speaking of communication
Oh, and Enid
Enid you got a cold

I can get a job I can pay the phone bills
I can cut the lawn, cut my hair, cut out my cholesterol
I can work overtime I can work in a mine
I can do it all for you
But I don't want to

*Enid we never really knew each other anyway
Enid we never really knew each other anyway
Enid we never really knew each other anyway
Enid we never really knew each other anyway

*Drive you to dances, pay for your nightschool
Drive you to dances, pay for your nightschool

*I can teach you how to dance, how to sing, how to knit
How to make things that you never ever made before
Enid, I can teach you how to use cookie cutters
To make crazy things out of Play-Doh
Little houses, little farms, little accessories for your mom
For your Barbie set, for your friends and your family
Enid, I can teach you how to snowmobile, cross-country ski, snowshoe
But I don't want to

Enid we never really knew each other anyway
Enid we never really knew each other anyway
Maybe we always saw right through each other anyway
But Enid we really never knew each other anyway
Enid we never really knew each other anyway
Enid we never really knew each other anyway
Enid we never really knew each other anyway

* Overlapping parts

Appendix 5.6: Lyrics for “If I Had \$1000000” by Barenaked Ladies

If I had a million dollars
If I had a million dollars
Well I'd buy you a house
I would buy you a house
And if I had a million dollars
If I had a million dollars
Buy you furniture for your house
Maybe a nice Chesterfield or an Ottoman
And if I had a million dollars
If I had a million dollars
Well I'd buy you a K-car
A nice reliant automobile

And If I had a million dollars
I'd buy your love

If I had a million dollars
I'd build a tree fort in our yard
If I had a million dollars
You could help it wouldn't be that hard
If I had a million dollars
Maybe we could put a little tiny fridge in there somewhere

Or maybe we could just go up there and hang out
Like open the fridge and stuff
And there are already foods layed out for us with little pre-wrapped sausages and things
Mmm
They have pre-wrapped sausages but they don't have pre-wrapped bacon
Well can you blame them?
Oh yeah

If I had a million dollars
If I had a million dollars
Well I'd buy you a fur coat
But not a real fur coat that's cruel
And if I had a million dollars
If I had a million dollars
Well I'd buy you an exotic pet
Yep! Like a llama or an emu
And if I had a million dollars
If I had a million dollars
Well I'd buy you John Merrick's remains
Oooh all them crazy elephant bones

And If I had a million dollars
I'd buy your love

If I had a million dollars
We wouldn't have to walk to the store
If I had a million dollars
No we'd take a limousine 'cause it costs more
If I had a million dollars
We wouldn't have to eat Kraft dinner

But we would eat Kraft dinner
Of course we would, we'd just eat more
And buy really expensive ketchups with it
That's right all the fanciest Dijon ketchups
Mmm
Mmm

If I had a million dollars
If I had a million dollars
Well I'd buy you a green dress
But not a real green dress that's cruel
And if I had a million dollars
If I had a million dollars
Well I'd buy you some art
A Picasso or a Garfunkel
And if I had a million dollars
If I had a million dollars
Well I'd buy you a monkey
Haven't you always wanted a monkey!

And if I had a million dollars
I'd buy your love

If I had a million dollars
If I had a million dollars
If I had a million dollars
If I had a million dollars
If I had a million dollars
I'd be rich

Appendix 5.7: Lyrics for The Tragically Hip's "Fully Completely"

Bring me back in shackles
Hang me long out in the sun
Exonerate me
Forget about me

I recommend measures for ending it
Lover, she simply slammed the door
She said, "You're going to miss me
Wait and you'll see"
Fully and completely

I ponder the endlessness of the stars
Ignoring said same of my father
Either it'll move me
Or it'll move right through me
Fully and completely

Bring me back in shackles
And hang me long out in the sun
Exonerate me
Then forget about me
Wait and you'll see
Just wait and you'll see
Fully and completely
Fully and completely
Fully completely

Appendix 5.8: Lyrics to The Tragically Hip's "Locked in the Trunk of a Car"

They don't know how old I am
They found armor in my belly
From the sixteenth century
Conquistador, I think
They don't know how old I am
They found armor in my belly
Passion out of machine revving tension
Lashing out at machine revving tension
Rushing by the machine revving tension

Morning broke out the backside of a truck stop
The end of a line a real, rainbow-likening, luck stop
Where you could say I became chronologically fucked up
Put ten bucks in just to get the tank topped off

Then I found a place it's dark and it's rotted
It's a cool, sweet kinda place
Where the copters won't spot it
And I destroyed the map, I even thought I forgot it
However, everyday I'm dumping the body
It'd be better for us if you don't understand
It'd be better for me if you don't understand
Yea

And I found a place it's dark and it's rotted
It's a cool, sweet kinda place
Where the copters won't spot it
And I destroyed the map, I'd carefully dotted
However, everyday I'm dumping the body
It'd be better for us if you don't understand
It'd be better for us if you don't understand
It'd be better for me if you don't understand

Let me out
Let me out
Let me out
Let me out
Let me out
Let me out
Let me out

Conclusion

On 21 November 2008, Kenny MacLean, who rose to fame in the mid-1980s as bassist for Platinum Blonde, played a showcase for his third solo LP, *Completely*, at the Mod Club in Toronto. The music industry-oriented party reflected MacLean's individual achievements as a recording artist in Canada. Nonetheless, the Scottish-born musician still longed for a Platinum Blonde reunion. At one point during the successful showcase, MacLean invited his old friend Mark Holmes, the former lead singer and founder of Platinum Blonde, on stage to belt out a couple of songs from the glory days. The crowd responded enthusiastically. A full-fledged reunion seemed at hand. After the party, MacLean headed to his recording studio nearby, planning to spend the night in the living quarters there. He collapsed in the bathroom while brushing his teeth and died from heart failure.¹ MacLean perished at fifty-two years of age. His death inspired Holmes to revive Platinum Blonde.

The resurrection of Platinum Blonde reflected the growing appetite for nostalgic concerts displayed by middle-aged Canadians in the early twenty-first century. Rock music culture centres itself around youthfulness. If you are long in the tooth, then rocking encompasses emulating the young. People who came of age in the mid-1980s craved live

¹ The author gleaned information on Kenny MacLean's last night from: Raveena Aulakh, "Platinum Blonde Bassist Found Dead in Studio; Kenny MacLean 'Had Everything to Live For' Says Former Drummer in '80s Glam Band," *The Toronto Star*, 25 November 2008, sec. News.

performances by popular recording artists from that era and paid good money to see them. Platinum Blonde played its first reunion gig with all three original members in March 2010. Unfortunately, drummer Chris Steffler had to quit the group soon thereafter because of hearing damage. Mark Holmes and Sergio Galli pressed on with some hired help. Platinum Blonde released a new album in 2012 called *Now and Never*, and give select shows across Canada to this day. Glass Tiger serviced the nostalgic concert scene much sooner. The Newmarket quartet reconvened in 2003 and issued a twenty-year retrospective compilation LP, *No Turning Back*, in 2005. Glass Tiger performed mainly outdoor summer gigs that it happily stocked with old hits, until recently, when lead singer Alan Frew suffered a serious stroke in August 2015. Frew recovered almost fully and has returned to the road with the band once again. The sentimental yearning that fuels these trips down memory lane exhibits no sign of abatement.

Each of the three roots rock acts this dissertation examined regularly continued to produce records and tour in support of them. Blue Rodeo scored the biggest commercial success of its career in the winter of 1993-1994 with *Five Days in July*. Co-founders Jim Cuddy and Greg Keelor wrote and cut tracks for eleven other studio albums over the next twenty-three years. Blue Rodeo issued a greatest hits LP in 2001 and a box set in 2012, the same year the Canadian Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences inducted the group into the prestigious Canadian Music Hall of Fame. Blue Rodeo has sold two and a half million albums in Canada, and counting. The aging ensemble still records new material and actively tours. Cowboy Junkies peaked in popularity at the turn of the 1980s. None of the twelve studio albums the group released since 1993 have matched the commercial and critical impact of *The Trinity Session*, not even *Trinity Revisited*, the band's remake

of its most famous LP. Cowboy Junkies also authored several compilations, including two box sets, and five live albums during its lengthy career. Throughout it all, the Toronto-based troupe has maintained a small, core contingent of fans around the world by touring selectively. Cowboy Junkies is in the studio right now as I write these words, preparing its next record, due out in 2018. The Tragically Hip enjoyed a rather remarkable run in the past quarter-century. Its first three LPs each sold at least a million copies in Canada and the band's following ten studio albums achieved more than two million in combined domestic sales. The group also issued a compilation of greatest hits and a comprehensive box set in 2005, which both coincided with The Tragically Hip's Canadian Music Hall of Fame initiation. The Kingston quintet established itself as the paragon of Anglo rock music in Canada for decades. In May 2016, news that lead singer Gordon Downie had a terminal brain tumour shocked many Canadians. The Tragically Hip completed a highly publicized national tour that summer. The sold-out series of concerts turned out to be Downie's last with the ensemble. He passed away in October 2017.

Of all the bands that this research project studied, quirky suburbanites Barenaked Ladies proved most successful internationally. "World pop domination is what we're after," co-founder Steven Page did admit, half-jokingly, back in 1991.² The group has sold fifteen million albums across the globe since then. Barenaked Ladies cracked the lucrative United States music market in 1998 with "One Week," the hit single from *Stunt*. The ensemble's extraordinary record sales rapidly tapered off in the early twenty-first century. Barenaked Ladies subsequently diversified its discography, releasing several

² John Doyle, "Goofiness Is Its Own Reward for Boys from the 'Burbs," *The Globe and Mail*, 10 August 1991, sec. Entertainment.

different themed records, live albums, and compilations during the last fifteen years. In February 2009, Page left the band by mutual agreement. Barenaked Ladies, nonetheless, have kept recording new material and tour extensively. The group currently derives most of its fame from having composed the theme song for a popular American television show, “The Big Bang.”

This dissertation argued that Anglo rock music functioned as a ground on which Canadians engineered both social preservation and transformation in the late twentieth century. A range of people participated in rock culture through a multifaceted discourse about authenticity that categorized sound recordings, defined bodily norms, negotiated commerce and technology, and evaluated collective communication in Canada. The pursuit of real rock, although infrequently a potent mode of subversion, often affirmed the social hierarchies of the status quo.

This study found that the principle of originality fundamentally structured the discourse of sonic authenticity and how it categorized sound recordings in Canada. Every music group under examination had to display an original tone on each of its sound recordings for critics to categorize them as rock. Originality, according to rock culture, encompassed the balancing of traditionalism with innovation. That is, real rockers sounded somewhat similar to previous leading recording artists in the genre while simultaneously expressing a ground breaking musical idiosyncrasy. This tricky criterion highlighted the centrality of pastiche and intertextuality to the postmodern cultural form.

The discourse of sonic authenticity also prized serious and meaningful lyrics. In the mid-1980s, amid a surge in popularity of so-called relevant rock, Platinum Blonde turned the second half of its *Alien Shores* record into a mini concept album. Glass Tiger,

meanwhile, stocked *Diamond Sun* with lyrics that broached social and political issues. Each band put forth a special bid for sonic authenticity through the words of its songs. By the turn of the decade, roots-oriented alternative outfits such as Blue Rodeo, The Tragically Hip, and Cowboy Junkies, represented the pinnacle of serious and meaningful lyricism in English-Canadian rock music. Furthermore, in 1992, music journalists refused to categorize *Gordon* by Barenaked Ladies as rock largely because the group furnished the LP with flippant and trivial lyrics.

This dissertation highlighted the complex and contested process of transforming space into place in Canada during the Early Digital age. The importance of displaying a real sense of place intensified as the years passed, becoming a key component of the discourse of sonic authenticity in Canada. Music journalists lambasted Glass Tiger in 1988 for expressing a foreign sense of place in its “U.S. corporate rock.” The following year critics hailed The Tragically Hip for the local sense of place it displayed on *Up To Here*. By 1992, all the leading Anglo rock bands punctuated their lyrical content with Canadian national markers. Consumers and critics responded enthusiastically. As the economic and political condition of neoliberalism intensified and the cultural condition of postmodernism flourished, Canadians looked to a sense of place for stability in an increasingly uncertain new world order. A gradation of scale clearly informed the conversion of space into place. The imagined and material components of suburban Canada as voiced by Barenaked Ladies, for instance, constituted a peculiar local classification. Meanwhile, The Tragically Hip’s recounting of foundational myths and heroic narratives represented a particular national calibration. Analysis of the production and reception of select English-Canadian sound recordings also revealed that senses of

place structured a normative landscape. Musical groups transmitted ideas about what represented right, just, and appropriate conduct in Canada through their records. The Tragically Hip's "Born in the Water" chastised anglophone bigotry in Sault Saint Marie. In "The Last Spike," Cowboy Junkies railed against the adverse effects of neoliberalism on Canadian society. Blue Rodeo's "Fools Like You," meanwhile, denounced government officials for not addressing Indigenous land claims. Finally, "If I Had \$1000000" by Barenaked Ladies preached about the cruelty of harvesting animal fur for clothing. Each song communicated different perspectives on the same place, Canada, and advanced distinctive behavioural expectations for that space.

This research project also clearly outlined the contested nature of the discourse of sonic authenticity. Canadian music journalists debated the categorization of specific sound recordings amongst each other and, occasionally, with the band members who created them. These aesthetic disagreements signified the inherent tension involved in approximating the ambiguous principle of originality. Determining if a particular music group fulfilled the moral ideal of authenticity proved contentious in almost every case.

This study discovered that the discourse of embodied authenticity defined bodily norms for rock culture in Canada. It described three major schools of fashion between 1984 and 1994: New Romantic, roots rock revivalist, and suburban alternative. The ostentatious New Romantic style, epitomized by Platinum Blonde and Glass Tiger in the mid-1980s, emerged in reaction to the austerity of the punk rock revolution and in conjunction with the advent of music video television stations. Big intricately styled hair, the heavy application of cosmetics, and flashy upscale clothing all characterized the New Romantic look. Platinum Blonde and Glass Tiger each strove to appear fashionable,

especially on the small screen, as a means of garnering fame and fortune. Members of both bands, however, claimed that their choice of attire conformed to the ideal of authenticity: they were just being themselves; they contrived none of it. The roots rock revivalist school of fashion surfaced in response to New Romanticism. In contradistinction, Blue Rodeo, The Tragically Hip, and Cowboy Junkies all sported casual blue-collar outfits, wore no makeup (except for Margo Timmins), and displayed naturally styled hair. Each group issued a strong bid for embodied authenticity by signalling it cared more about crafting rock music than appearing trendy. The tides of fashion in Canada had clearly turned. By 1987, Platinum Blonde even dropped its “pretty boy” New Romantic image for a roots rock revivalist visual identity. Finally, in the early 1990s, a suburban alternative style became chic for a while, thanks in large part to Barenaked Ladies. The Scarborough quintet temporarily impeded the reign of a roots-oriented metropolitan coolness in Canadian rock culture. Barenaked Ladies dressed in boyish clothing and exhibited nerdy mannerisms, defying dominant corporeal expectations.

The discourse of embodied authenticity determined the bodies that truly represented rock music in Canada. Whiteness organized rock culture in Canada during the late twentieth century. Skin colour only mattered when a band incorporated non-White-coded music into its sound recording: issues of race surfaced exclusively when Platinum Blonde dabbled in funk, Cowboy Junkies and The Tragically Hip emulated the blues, and Barenaked Ladies experimented with rap music. Able bodies alone earned embodied authenticity. Favoured musicians and singers alike displayed bodily skill and dexterity in pre-recorded music videos or live on stage in concert. The Canadian music

press coverage of Margo Timmins highlighted the gender imbalance within rock culture. Women rarely participated in the production of rock music in Canada. Critics focused their attention on the appearance of the lead singer for Cowboy Junkies. Timmins lacked access to the power men enjoyed in rock because she did not play an instrument. Normative heterosexuality underlined the discourse of embodied authenticity. Homophobic reactions to the androgyny of the New Romantic movement illuminated this bodily norm best. Preferred rockers hailed from the middle class, though they often dressed as working-class individuals. Rock 'n' roll's blue-collar roots clearly shaped contemporary understandings of what constituted embodied authenticity in Canada. Lastly, rock culture appeared decidedly youth oriented. Made by and for people aged between eighteen and thirty-something, legitimate rock music supposedly sounded too mature for young teens and too rebellious for adults.

This study determined that the concept of autonomy regulated the discourse of folkloric authenticity. Independence of will encouraged the proper negotiation of commerce and technology in an increasingly neoliberal political and economic condition. The discourse of folkloric authenticity championed any band that demanded and secured production oversight in the recording studio, thereby freeing itself from the devitalizing effect of external corporate control. Several Canadian music journalists denounced Glass Tiger in 1986 for the group's seeming reliance upon producer Jim Vallance and rock superstar Bryan Adams while cutting tracks for *The Thin Red Line*. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, roots rock outfits Blue Rodeo, The Tragically Hip, and Cowboy Junkies each strove for sonic fidelity on its sound recordings. Every ensemble displayed its autonomy by negotiating high-tech studio gear without caving to economic incentives

and selling out. Barenaked Ladies, on the other hand, set aside concerns over folkloric authenticity during the production of *Gordon*. The acoustic quintet conquered the mainstream popular music market in Canada, yet lost its alternative credibility in the process. Furthermore, growing corporate sponsorship of music groups riled Canadian rock culture throughout the Early Digital era. The folklore paradigm placed authenticity outside of the commercial sphere. Critics railed against Platinum Blonde for allying itself with Labatt Breweries on the *Alien Shores* tour and praised Blue Rodeo for refusing corporate sponsorships as a matter of pride.

This study found that the discourse of communal authenticity verified the rock status of a given concert by gauging the actions of band members on stage as well as the composition and reaction of ticket holders in the audience. Even though sound recordings constituted the basic paradigm of rock music, Canadians still viewed the postmodern cultural form as a performance art. Critics expected musicians to demonstrate their skill in rock and dispel any notion that they depended on studio trickery to sound talented. Performers also had to act spontaneously and avoid choreographed movements or poses. Last but not least, favoured musicians formed emotional and social bonds with the crowd, creating a sense of belonging for all present. Music journalists measured audience members as well. A majority of ticket holders needed to be young men for critics to ascribe communal authenticity to a particular concert. Platinum Blonde and Glass Tiger suffered derision for attracting crowds of predominantly teenaged women. Meanwhile, Blue Rodeo, The Tragically Hip, and Cowboy Junkies each drew enough men to its shows to not warrant correction. Ideal ticket holders also applauded vociferously, yelled in approval, sang along, danced energetically, called for encores, and generally enjoyed

the concert. Music journalists participated in the discourse of communal authenticity as they evaluated the collective communication of a band's specific live performance. Their sexist understandings of music appreciation only served to privilege men and marginalize women in Canadian rock culture.

This dissertation repeatedly pointed out that authentication did not occur naturally; instead, prevailing views of what constituted authenticity became naturalized. As cultural anthropologist Maureen Mahon made clear: "We construct authenticity and we depend on it to evaluate the quality of art and the integrity of people. A useful category, authenticity promises certainty in otherwise ambiguous processes."³ This study demonstrated that, between 1984 and 1994, the discourse about authenticity extended a degree of certitude to the equivocal ideologies undergirding the Canadian social order: race, ability, gender, sexuality, class, age, and place. Rock music formed a cultural field on which people in Canada reinforced or subverted these dominant ideologies. Individuals throughout Canadian society expressed or encouraged the expression of powerful racial, abled, gendered, sexed, economic, age-based, and geographic hierarchies. At the same time, though, others actively worked to undermine them. The ideal of authenticity ruled either way. Nevertheless, these ideological battles took place within a rather turbulent historical context. A constitutional crisis gripped Canada. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, the federal government tried to reconcile the demands of Québec and fulfill its obligations to Indigenous peoples. The fabric of national unity seemed frayed at best. Meanwhile, free trade with the United States and the growing globalization of capitalist market economies heightened tensions

³ Maureen Mahon, *Right to Rock: The Black Rock Coalition and the Cultural Politics of Race* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 10.

in Canadian society. Plus, the end of the Cold War signalled the onset of a new world order that revolved around a lone superpower. The ideal of authenticity promised people surety amidst such acute uncertainty.

This study strongly suggests that the discourse about authenticity responded to the psychological needs of people living in Canada during the late twentieth century. In modernity, Western culture posited a self-sufficient and centred inner self, within which things felt then found expression through word and deed. Pressure to conform outwardly posed the greatest danger because it reduced the capacity to listen to this inner voice and led to the alienation of the subject. Modern freedom and autonomy focused people on themselves. The ideal of authenticity required individuals to discover and articulate their own unique identity. This growing concern for “the real me,” a unified, coherent individual who existed prior to all experience, has met with heavy criticism since the mid-twentieth century from hermeneutic, post-structuralist, and dialogical philosophers such as Hans-Georg Gadamer, Michel Foucault, and Mikhail Bakhtin.⁴ Nevertheless, despite a purported crisis of belief in the possibility of genuine self-expression or objective representation, the ideal of authenticity has prevailed in rock music culture. Its endurance speaks to its profound importance. Canadians grounded themselves through their psyches and the ideal of authenticity provided the means, as well as the moral force, to do so.

In the late twentieth century, the discourse about authenticity proposed to firmly fix Canadian audiences and rock music performers alike in a place outside discourse, a spot somehow free of the machinery of neoliberal late stage capitalism, a state where

⁴ Hans Weisethaunet and Ulf Lindberg, “Authenticity Revisited: The Rock Critic and the Changing Real,” *Popular Music and Society* 33, no. 4 (October 2010): 479.

consumers and recording artists that yearned for genuineness could commune with a timeless and priceless heritage. The discourse about authenticity linked myriad people across Canada to a wider whole that seemed beyond their choice. It connected individuals to an external reality, eliciting a deep feeling of belonging. The quasi-religious character of the discourse about authenticity appears unmistakable. Not to mention, ironic, considering the secularity of Canadian rock music culture.

Given the terribly limited historiography of rock music in Canada, this dissertation mostly covered uncharted academic territory. Monographs by Bob Mersereau, Ryan Edwardson, Greg Potter, and Martin Melhuish offered broad historical surveys of postwar Canadian popular music.⁵ In addition, the textbooks *Rock: A Canadian Perspective* and *Rockin' Out: Canadian Edition* provided general introductions to the same material. This dissertation differentiated itself from these previous works by focusing upon a particular decade and examining a specific genre of music. Music journalists Michael Barclay, Ian A.D. Jack, and Jason Schneider did something moderately similar in *Have Not Been the Same: The CanRock Renaissance, 1985-1995*. Still, rather than conducting a detailed historical analysis of the era's leading Anglo recording artists, the trio of writers composed an extended argument for a comprehensive Canadian rock canon based on their own personal understandings of authenticity. Additionally, unlike this study, *Have Not Been the Same* focused almost exclusively on individual biography and did not interrogate the musicological aspects of rock music in the late twentieth century.

⁵ Bob Mersereau, *The History of Canadian Rock "N" Roll* (Milwaukee: Backbeat Books, 2015); Ryan Edwardson, *Canuck Rock: A History of Canadian Popular Music* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009); Greg Potter, *Hand Me Down World: The Canadian Pop-Rock Paradox* (Toronto: Macmillan Canada, 1999); Martin Melhuish, *Oh What a Feeling: A Vital History of Canadian Music* (Kingston: Quarry Press, 1996).

This study of Canadian cultural history delved into the seemingly intangible realm of sound. Established historians such as Ian McKay have examined popular music in Canada at length, but for unknown reasons, they regularly overlooked the sonic qualities of the material under investigation.⁶ The recent scholarship of Barbara Lorenzkowski on the interactions of language and music as well as Edward Jones-Imhotep on the sonic has broken that trend.⁷ This research project followed Jones-Imhotep's lead and placed the sounds of rock music front and centre in the historical narrative. It deconstructed leading recordings to reveal the dominant norms and unarticulated presuppositions that animated their production and reception in Canada. Recorded sounds testified to the powerful social and political processes that structured Canadian popular culture in the 1980s and early 1990s. As such, this dissertation has articulated the importance of sound recordings to the comprehension of the past.

This dissertation contributed to Canadian communications history in a number of significant ways. To begin with, it pushed the study of communications deeper into the late twentieth century than before, expanding the temporal academic horizon. This research project also afforded plenty of discussion to music journalism and its role in shaping both the production and reception sound recordings in Canada. Members of the Canadian music press played a big part in the regulation of the discourse about authenticity. Last but certainly not least, this dissertation advanced communications

⁶ See: Ian McKay, *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994). Furthermore, all of the monographs cited in note number five above overlook the sonic qualities of the popular music they examine.

⁷ Barbara Lorenzkowski, *Sounds of Ethnicity: Listening to German North America, 1850 - 1914* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2010). Lorenzkowski's monograph looks at the role of German-language education, choral groups, and music festivals in creating both an ethnic sense of self and opportunities for cultural exchanges at multiple levels. Edward Jones-Imhotep, "Malleability and Machines: Glenn Gould and the Technological Self," *Technology and Culture* 57, no. 2 (April 2016): 287–321. In this article, Jones-Imhotep examines Glenn Gould's abandonment of the concert hall in the 1960s for the isolation and potential of the recording studio.

history by exploring the tremendous impact music video had on Canadian rock music culture in the late twentieth century. The stimulating postmodern art form transformed the promotion of sound recordings, intensified the importance of a performer's visual identity, and collapsed the supposed division between creative artistry and commerce.

This study enhanced the scholarship on race in Canada by attending to the influential concept of Whiteness. Many historians, rightfully so, have made racialized minorities the focal point of their inquiries into the Canadian past, focusing on important issues of marginalization and resistance. This work looked at the racialized majority instead, and the ways in which it established social predominance in the 1980s and early 1990s. It found that only the axiomatic nature of Whiteness exceeded its ubiquitousness in rock music culture. That is, although the concept of Whiteness clearly organized the sound recording industry in Canada, people rarely mentioned or questioned this point of fact. Discussions of race arose solely when White performers incorporated non-White-coded musical styles on their sound recordings. Most Canadians understood rock music as a White cultural form. The demographic majority, then, designated yet another avenue of access to social power and prestige to itself. Ultimately, this study aligned with anti-racist history by pointing out the construction of racial hierarchies in and through popular music.

This dissertation also added to the burgeoning history of gender and sexuality in Canada. Following in the footsteps of Christopher Dummitt's *The Manly Modern* and the recently published edited collection *Canadian Men and Masculinities*, this study used rock music as a window into the commanding popular perceptions of manliness during the late twentieth century. It discovered, among other things, that hetero-normativity

often intersected with ideologies of gender: only men who exhibited and expressed sexual attraction toward women constituted real rockers. Heterosexuality continued to serve as a potent marker of masculinity in Canada. Nonetheless, throughout this dissertation, I have worked to engage feminist understandings of Canadian rock music culture at every turn.

In conclusion, “Real Rock” provides insights into the production and reception of popular culture in Canada between 1984 and 1994. By deconstructing some of the best-selling sound recordings of the era and placing them in historical context, this dissertation reveals the compelling forces that organized and shaped the Canadian sound recording industry in the past. This study evokes the familiar adage that all art is political. It argues that through a widespread discourse about authenticity, systems of power regulated popular music sound recordings especially because they represented the common and the ordinary in Canadian society. Defining what constituted the everyday involved profound ideological deliberations. Unpacking the seemingly mundane, as this dissertation aimed to do, helps to expand the historical inquiry of Canada.

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