

**Shakin' All Over: Canadian Pop Music in the 1960s. Written by Nicholas Jennings and directed by Gary McGroarty. 1 video disc (90 min.): col., some b&w. Kelowna, BC: Filmwest Associates [<http://indigo.filmwest.com>], [2007?]. \$195.00**

Originally aired on CBC in January 2006, this film traces Canadian popular music, at least the kind rooted in rhythm and blues, rockabilly and folk, from the early sixties to the establishment of the Canadian Content rules for radio and television in 1971. The film consists of clips from close to sixty songs, dozens of interviews, and archival footage going all the way back to Ian and Sylvia Tyson discussing that epiphanous moment when they heard Dylan perform "Blowin' in the Wind" in Greenwich Village to Crowbar playing "Oh What a Feeling" in the early 1970s at the "dawn of Cancon." The Tysons realized they could also write their own tunes rather than exclusively performing traditional material. Hearing and seeing the duo perform their "Four Strong Winds" in a clip from about 1964, one realizes, though, just how proper the Canadians sounded in comparison to Dylan, with his scruffy and idiosyncratic whine. They may have taken their cue from him, but their musical manners were clearly of a different nature, suggesting a direction rooted more in the traditions of the British Isles than American folk. Ironically, when the Yorkville and Yonge Street music scenes begin to develop and there was talk of a Toronto sound in 1966, it was the music of Ronnie Hawkins, a transplanted American with a southern drawl who, at least according to the film, personified that sound.

As the film moves along, television archival footage alternates with commentary by the musicians and producers involved at the time and endorsements by the current generation of Canadian pop musicians, most of which unfortunately ends up being fairly innocuous and generally uninformative (e.g, "her words and stuff like that...she's just an amazing talent...an amazing woman"). There are also cover versions of some of the classics, examples being Margo Timmins and Jeff Healey doing a highly stylized version of the Guess Who's "American Woman" and Ron Sexsmith's rendition of Gordon Lightfoot's "If You Could Read My Mind." These come across as an attempt by the producers to validate the significance of the old guard by enlisting the new guard, a demonstration of historical continuity and proof that the music lives on. The original archival footage, though, steals the show, and one cannot help but wish that the time used for commentary and cover versions by contemporary musicians was spent on more of the originals. Particularly enjoyable are the stage acts and costumes of the day, some of it deliberately humorous, like the keyboard player of The Classics playing solitaire with his right hand while comping with his left.

The film, written by Nicholas Jennings, is based on his book, *Before the Gold Rush: Flashbacks to the Dawn of the Canadian Sound* (1997). The book is a quick but useful read, illustrated with photos, CHUM charts and band lineage diagrams, providing the

narrative to understand how a regionalized Canadian music scene thrived under the umbrella of Cancon in 1971, in effect establishing the music industry in Canada. Much of the narrative is absent in the film, but that seems to be the nature of the medium with its reliance on sound bites, snippets of performances, and voiceovers. We do get a good sense of the variety of music that falls under the rubric of “popular,” ranging from Anne Murray’s middle-of-the-road stylizations to a psychedelic band like the Paupers. Their auspicious beginnings included an upstaging of Jefferson Airplane at the Cafe Au Go Go in New York during an engagement intended as a media event for the West coast band, but their appearance at the 1967 Monterey Pop Festival later in the year was disastrous. Like so many other bands of the era, the Paupers’ music is largely unavailable now. Hearing and seeing them makes one realize that there were some remarkably original musicians working in Canada that remain unknown. And that Toronto sound ...well, according to Jennings’ book, there was little agreement as to what it was, other than the bands played louder than their U.S. counterparts and, quoting Luke Gibson of the Apostles, it was “kind of whiny.” Sound familiar?

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