

Randy Bachman: Takin' Care of Business. By John Einarson and Randy Bachman. Toronto: McArthur & Company, 2000. 527 pp. Hardcover. ISBN 1-55278-160-7 \$34.95

In 1994 Randy Bachman donated his papers to the National Library of Canada for “a tax credit well into seven figures”; as he says, “life from that point on has been sweet” (p. 425).¹ Sweet indeed; where else but in Canada could a rock star get rich this way? Bachman is known for his work as a songwriter, guitarist, and singer with The Guess Who and Bachman Turner Overdrive. He has also released some less successful solo albums, and more recently has been pitching his songs to country music artists in Nashville.

His musical career is charted with meticulous attention to detail in this book. Einarson has written several books on the Canadian rock music scene, including *American Woman: The Story of The Guess Who* (Kingston, ON: Quarry Press, 1995), and he clearly knows the territory well. About half of the book consists of transcriptions from a very lengthy interview with Bachman, who obviously has a good head for the minute details of his own life. The rest consists of interviews with Bachman’s family and associates (though not with his first wife, Lorayne, who refused to cooperate), and filler material by Einarson.

¹ A summary description of the Randy Bachman *fonds* can be seen online at <http://www.nlc-bnc.ca/6/28/s28-1000-e.html>. The date of birth is given incorrectly there: Bachman was born in 1943, not 1946.

Randy was not the brightest boy growing up in Winnipeg. He failed grades 10 and 11 and, by his own admission, would have flunked out of high school altogether if it had not been for summer school. He cannot read music and has an indifferent singing voice. Nevertheless, he made over a million dollars by writing and singing a song that literally contains three chords (the eponymous “Takin’ Care of Business”), and by 1977 he was worth ten million dollars. Then, after a lengthy custody battle with his first wife, Lorayne, he found himself a million dollars in debt by the 1980s – financially ruined, until the National Library and Sony Music, which bought the publishing rights to his songs, came to the rescue.

Inevitably one dwells upon money in discussing Randy Bachman, because aside from music and his family, it is the only thing he has ever really cared about. While other rock stars of his vintage were snorting their profits up their nose and travelling first class all the way, Bachman was staying at the Holiday Inn, taking cheap flights or the bus, and investing. At the height of BTO’s success in the mid-1970s, the group is said to have been making half a million dollars every ten days (p. 291). Each member of the group continues to get a five-figure monthly cheque as a share of the return on investments made by Bachman and his money managers. How

this squares with the fact that Bachman was broke in the 1980s is puzzling.

It is unclear how the millions disappeared, but the two-year long bitter legal battle with Lorayne for custody of the six children seems to have been the main cause. The couple met in a Regina coffee shop, and for Bachman it was love at first sight. Lorayne Stephenson was a Mormon from Salt Lake City and a model; Bachman had a Catholic mother and Lutheran father, but became a Mormon for Lorayne. For much of their marriage he was on the road playing gigs; it was left to Lorayne to raise the children. The couple separated in 1979, and eventually Bachman won custody of the children, although two of the six chose to remain with their mother, who moved to a Mormon community in Utah. Bachman was married for a second time in 1982 to the singer Denise McCann from Iowa; this time she converted to the Mormon faith, although she later drifted away from it. The couple had a child and currently live in the Gulf Islands between Vancouver and Victoria.

There is something ever so slightly pathetic about the BTO revivals in the

1980s, especially when there were two competing nostalgia groups on the road, one fronted by Tim Bachman and one by Randy Bachman. (Randy had kicked his brother Tim out of the original BTO, and the bitter feelings lasted for years.) Equally sad was the 2000 Guess Who reunion tour, which came about as a result of an offer to play the 1999 Pan Am Games in Winnipeg. The Pan Am Games gig paid \$200,000 for a 20-minute set, and the resulting 26-city tour grossed about \$6 million. But the pictures in this book attest to the fact that the members were certainly not looking their best, however they may have sounded. It really is time for Randy Bachman to step aside and make room for his son Tal, who released a successful CD with Sony in 1999 and seems more than capable of carrying on in his father's footsteps.

Incidentally, there is no evidence that either Bachman or Einarson made use of the Randy Bachman *fonds* for this book. Which does tend to make one wonder if the National Library got good value for its money.

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