

# Music for crossing the border

BY RON PETRIE, THE LEADER-POST    SEPTEMBER 25, 2009

To and fro music, here to there ditties -- call the musical genre what you will: back and forth numbers, fack and borth tunes -- have rich tradition along the Alberta-Saskatchewan border.

Music for crossing the Fourth Meridian has been around ever since the two sides emerged as Canadian provinces of national and economic significance, Saskatchewan with its 1905 entry into Confederation and Alberta after striking oil in 1947.

Westward drivers since 1972 have enjoyed Gordon Lightfoot's "Alberta Bound"; since 2005 Paul Brandt's completely different version of "Alberta Bound," and in the years between, for starting life anew in the province next door, Pink Floyd's "Money."

Back the other way, eastbound on the Yellowhead and Trans-Canada, border-crossing standards range from "On, Roughriders" and "Green is the Color" to "The Best is Yet to Come," and "Paint the Whole World Green," same as those westbound songs the previous day to Calgary or Edmonton, but with the volume turned down, on account of the throbbing headaches.

Saskatchewan's road music is not exclusively football tailgate tunes, however. It only seems that way. In 1971, Jim Roberts recorded a back-from-Alberta classic -- a back-from-anywhere song, actually -- called "Saskatchewan," only the single most beautiful tribute to the province ever. (Hey! Yes, you! The government people who make stuff and things into official Saskatchewan emblems! Thanks to your going nuts the past few years, we now have a provincial mineral, grass, sport and even a tartan -- an official chesterfield pattern, for crying out loud -- but still no song! (see suggestion above) (thank you)). Other popular soundtracks for incoming traffic include The Guess Who's "Runnin' Back to Saskatoon," and, raising no end of bonus government revenue from highway speed checks, The Arrogant Worms' "The Last Saskatchewan Pirate."

Point is, our interprovincial comings and goings have generated a body of music that would fill both discs of a double CD compilation, one for that-a-way and the other for this-a-way.

Make room for a brand-new addition.

From their new album "Losin' Lately Gambler," Corb Lund and the Hurtin' Albertans could well have themselves another country hit, at least regionally, in the tune "Long Gone to Saskatchewan."

You will not believe your ears. Never before has a successful Albertan sung with such genuine affection the praises of Saskatchewan, unless you include Dwain Lingenfelter's recent byelection campaign, and I don't. "Long Gone" is a great tune in the witty, rollicking style of Corb Lund, a song that tells the tale of a foothills rancher who, squeezed by escalating land prices, urban sprawl, high costs of

living and low-paying off-farm jobs, says to heck with it and moves his operation to Saskatchewan, and with five times more land.

Listen to a clip: She's a little bit flatter but the cows are as fatter/ so I think I'm going to get me a tent/ 'cause I can buy me an acre beside a nice lake there/ that would cost me a home just to rent...Adios, good-bye, farewell, so long/ I'm long gone to Saskatchewan/ where the gettin's good for the gettin'-gone/ long gone to Saskatchewan...

I am hesitant to describe the tune as satirical commentary on the inevitable social manifestations from the antithetical economic courses within two similarly endowed geo-political jurisdictions -- hesitant because, from what I know of Corb Lund, if I went all egghead here, the Alberta ranch boy would take that straw cowboy hat of his and whap it upside my Saskatchewan farm boy cap. What's more, I would thank him for the corrective action, Prairie guy to Prairie guy.

Instead, let us answer the question more likely on the minds of Saskatchewan music listeners. Did Lund actually get it to rhyme with something? "Saskatchewan," that is?

Gettin'-gone/Saskatchewan. Long gone/Saskatchewan. I tip my cap to an extraordinarily strong effort. Certainly Lund did the best he could with the correct, or "outsider," pronunciation of the province's name. Our own way of saying it, sketch'win, is impossible to work in lyrically, at least not without resorting to sneezes. Even with foreign pronunciation, my own unfinished provincial anthem, going on 25 years now, "Saskatchewan, My Saskatchewan," is still stalled for plausible poetic situations in which to "latch a john," "thatch a lawn" or "scratch a swan."

It is the idea of an Albertan singing kindly of Saskatchewan that seems oddly in reverse, and a point to ponder.

Could it be that after all these years, Saskatchewan and Alberta are ready to set aside the petty rivalry, to recognize each other's strengths and weakness without envy or scorn, and to forge a new, progressive relationship based on mutual respect between sister provinces?

Furthermore, pfft.

As if.

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