



THIS WEEK WITH NTV'S JIM FURLONG

A FLAWED GEM

I didn't know Harry Hibbs in any real sense of the word but I did meet him once. I was lucky enough to have interviewed him in another existence of mine before television and radio when I was working in the world of print and doing some entertainment pieces. Harry was a difficult interview. He was really quiet and seemed a bit distant really. No matter. He will never be judged on how good an interview he was.

ON HIS OWN TERMS

He will be judged by his music and how it made people feel good. In that music I thought Harry Hibbs had a rare quality. He seemed to be essentially; "authentic." That is a nice word to use. That begs the question; Can you live in Toronto and work in a factory and then find fame in the Newfoundland Caribou Club playing to an ex-pat audience and still be ... authentic? Absolutely.

The authenticity of Harry Hibbs wasn't in geography. It was in his presentation. He was one of the very first entertainers from Newfoundland to appear on stage on his OWN terms and not as an imitation of some bigger star from afar.

He wasn't Newfoundland's answer to ... "playing bad country music with three chords." He was his own person with his own music, sung and played his own way. He donned a salt 'n' pepper cap and



Harry Hibbs... was one of the very first entertainers from Newfoundland to appear on stage on his own terms...

tapped his foot and played great music largely from Newfoundland but tunes as well from Ireland and other places. (My favourite was *Road to the Isles*).

Another person that stands out like that and has a place in Newfoundland's musical Pantheon is Wilf Doyle. Both Harry and Wilf played the accordion and tapped their feet. I wonder if there is a connection. Both, in music seem carried to another place. "Give me the beat boys and free my soul" is a line from another genre of music that speaks well to a place in music.

Harry Hibbs certainly wasn't perfect. He didn't have the greatest voice in the world. His range was limited but he could sure handle his accordion and played it in a very special way.

The music of Harry Hibbs found an audience with the Newfoundland diaspora across Ontario and then back home in Newfoundland. He became a star.

NEVER GOT RICH

Most people know the life of Harry Hibbs also wasn't without trouble. He was a flawed gem but the world of music is teeming with flawed gems.

That world didn't treat Harry very well. He recorded more than 20 albums, – some of them went "gold" but Harry Hibbs never got rich. He certainly could have done better financially if he had paid more attention to the business end of things, but in the end that is not who he was. He was Harry Hibbs. He was unique. He played wonderful music and he was most certainly from Bell Island, Newfoundland. ♦

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