



FILE PHOTO

THE LEGEND LIVES ON

On the heels of being inducted (posthumous) into Nova Scotia's Music Hall of Fame, *The Herald* pays tribute to legendary performer and musical icon Harry Hibbs

BY PAM PARDY GHENT

Harry Hibbs is a legend in this province. A glance at a salt n' pepper cap can trigger a musical memory for most who call this province home; *Between two Trees*, *Mussels in the Corner* and *Nobody's Child* are three songs that quickly come to this writer's mind.

But Hibbs is a legend beyond our shores, evidenced by his recent induction into Nova Scotia's Music Hall of Fame where he shares the honour with other inductees Rita MacNeil, John Allan Cameron, Anne Murray and Natalie MacMaster.



Russell Bowers, a Bell Island native, accepted the award on behalf of the Hibbs family.

Russell Bowers, a Bell Island native and OZFM and *Herald* alum (1991-94), had the honour of accepting the award on behalf of the Hibbs family.

'HARRY WAS A STAR'

Bowers, who is producer/host with *Daybreak* on CBC Radio One in Calgary, has long held a fascination with Hibbs, though the two never met.

"For me, it started when my parents gave me his records when I was a kid of maybe eight years old. It was pretty powerful to flip the record over and read the notes and see that Harry was from



“Harry had one of the top ten selling debut albums of all time, *Harry Hibbs at the Caribou Club* ... in today’s numbers, would be five times platinum.” — Russell Bowers

Bell Island, and Harry was a star.”

Bowers laughs, asking across the telephone line if every child has such thoughts. “I don’t know if that happens to every kid; that you pick up a record album and see the artist is from your home town. For me, it was powerful. I’d sit next to the record player and watch those red Arc Records labels go ‘round and ‘round and I would hum the tunes and sing along with the tunes and just dream.”

Bowers says he stopped listening to Harry when their record player broke.

Around that time his musical tastes had changed from home-grown traditional and folk music to top-40 pop.

But when Hibbs died of cancer in 1989 at the age of 47, Bowers says his interest in the man and his music returned, then surged with a vengeance in 2000 when he returned home to live for a while on Bell Island.

‘BEST OF’ CD

Bowers helped produce a 12 minute tourism video travellers could watch as they were going back and forth on

the ferry. “We decided to use Harry’s music in the background and realized that none of his stuff was out on CD, everything was only on vinyl.” Bowers checked out a few local record shops in the area. “I asked, if you had access to Harry’s music on CD would anybody buy it? And all the shops said yeah, they all get about a dozen requests a week for Harry’s music, they said.”

Bowers put his heart and soul into the project and helped create a radio documentary and a ‘Best of’ CD. There was so much music to pick from.

Harry’s career lasted 21 years, from 1968-1989. In that time, there were 21 official releases; one for every year. “He was prolific ... Harry had one of the top ten selling debut albums of all time, *Harry Hibbs at the Caribou Club*. To put his sales in today’s numbers, (that album) would be five times platinum.”

OFF THE FLOOR

And still, there’s more. To celebrate the Hall of Fame induction, Bowers gathered together some never-before-released live tracks taken from television show performances.

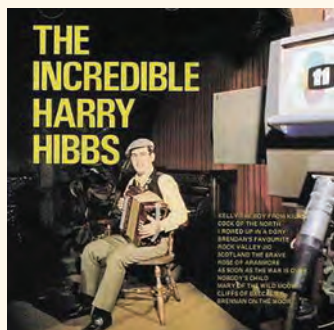
“*Off the Floor* is a collection of recordings Harry did for TV shows that we haven’t had the opportunity to release before. I thought, pop it up online and have it available on iTunes. There’s a version of *Roses are Blooming* that’s incredible.”

But then Bowers, as a fan of the man and his music, admits he may be biased. “It’s been a goal of mine to place Harry in a context of who Newfoundlanders are as a society in 2017 and who we are within a Canadian context. I think, if Harry Hibbs doesn’t happen, it’s possible that Newfoundlanders don’t

FILE PHOTOS



“I spoke with former premier Frank Moores ... He said they simply wouldn’t have beaten Joey if Harry Hibbs hadn’t happened.” — Russell Bowers



"I think, if Harry Hibbs doesn't happen, it's possible that Newfoundlanders don't have the identity they have today." — Russell Bowers

have the identity they have today." So much of what he's traced back supports that, he adds. "It was important that a Newfoundlander gained some national prominence and we hadn't had that before 1970. With Harry, we had a Newfoundlander showing up on national television shows broadcast from coast to coast. The identity, more than anything else, was what was coming across. You were hearing the accent, because Harry didn't sing with a neutral accent, he sang with a Newfoundland accent."

NEWFOUNDLAND CLUBS

And then there's the legacy of the NL Clubs around the globe. "Even if all he did was establish those, the first was the Caribou Club in '68, they went on to form like 250 all over the world where Newfoundlanders could hang on to their identity both at home and abroad. Newfoundlanders maintained pride in their identity to be themselves no matter if they were in Fort McMurray or B.C. Harry is ground zero for all that."

And then there's an election shocker of sorts. "I spoke with former premier Frank Moores not too long before he passed away and we spoke about the election in '72. He said they simply wouldn't have beaten Joey if Harry Hibbs hadn't happened. Moores went on a tour and the Tories would come in on the back of Harry's concerts and with everyone swept up in being Newfoundlanders they capitalized on that pride, defying what the Smallwood government were doing their best to modernize or Canadianize Newfoundlanders

and Harry helped push back on all that talk of making Newfoundlanders not be Newfoundlanders anymore. Harry embraced who we were and Moores capitalized on that and had no problem admitting it."

But politics aside, it is, after all, all about the music.

'HARRY'S FAVOURITE'

Peggy Gordon off *Somewhere at Sea* is Bowers' favourite Hibbs tune. "To me, it's perfect. You can listen to it today and it stands up for its quality. It's timeless. I love the emotion that came through. I later found out that was Harry's favourite too."



But beyond what Harry meant to him, it's what he symbolized to others that matters most, says Bowers.

"I recognize what he meant to so many. Someone will say, I played with Harry or I saw him play this time, in that place, and they share their experience. It feels remarkable that he's still creating such an emotional response. There were tens of thousands of views on the Harry Hibbs Facebook page when we posted the video of the Hall of Fame induction. The people who still care about Harry still care very deeply." ♦

RETWEET/LIKE OR SHARE

For your chance to win one of five digital downloads of
HARRY HIBBS: OFF THE FLOOR
Or send your favourite Harry Hibbs song to letters@nfdherald.com
Winners will be chosen May 12th



ENTER:

@theNFDherald OR [facebook.com/NFDherald](https://www.facebook.com/NFDherald) OR letters@nfdherald.com

