

HOWYAGETTINON?

THE NEWFOUNDLAND HERALD

BY NTV's SNOOK



A LETTER TO HARRY

So ol' Harry Hibbs finally got some proper recognition, right? In the NOVA SCOTIA Music Hall of Fame, no less... not that we have a proper Music Hall of Fame of our own to 'induct' him to, far as I can tell. So we'll take a mainland nod over no nod at all, eh boy? High time more of us made a fuss over our Harry, anyway – he was certainly one of a kind.

Born and reared on Bell Island, he took off, like most everyone else, after the mines closed, and came up roses on the Newfoundland stages in Ontario. Getting torn up on one job up there is what led him to take a crack at performing for the public... and the rest is history, sir. Sold more albums than everyone else who was at it in this country, at that time – combined. That's a fact. Blow your mind really. Some popular.

SHY SORTA GUY

Too bad he never got what he deserved on the moolah-side, or on the national applause meter either, truth be told. That was likely because he was a quiet, humble, shy sorta guy, from what you read. But also because he didn't stay with us long enough, really. Forty-seven years is all, before the damn cancer got him. Not near enough time. And, of course, he had a fairly-large demon gripped onto him, being no stranger to a bottle or two.

But because of this new pat-on-the-back, thanks to the mainland crowd, I thought it might be time for me to finally send old Harry the letter I never had the chance to write. Here we go...

Dear Harry Hibbs: Howyagettingon now? Seeing's how we never got to meet, (even though I was, and still am, a huge fan), I thought I might take a moment to jot down all the questions I ever had about your puzzle of a life and career.

Hope you don't mind – I'm not really expecting any answers. Even if you could respond, I'm sure you're fairly busy with gigs beyond the pearly gates, so...

ONE WILD DREAM

First, how does a boy from a big Bell Island family end up with the major-time career, a bar, a TV show, and 21 huge-hit records, on the mainland? And did you ever, in your wildest dreams, see all that happening? Sounds like one wild dream, and – can't imagine how it felt.

Second, where did all the money go? I'm sure you asked this lots of times yourself. You sold somewhere between two and eight MILLION albums, and got hardly anything from all of it. Dick Nolan complained about the same kind of robbery – how does that happen? Were there no laws or lawyers back then to make it right? Such a shame – the people with the gift and the hustle so often get burned.



Rotten is what it is.

So how bad was the bottle-battle, and how did you finally get a grip on that enemy? I don't know too many people who had it so bad but still won the fight, in the end. Sounds like you figured it out, and knew what it was taking from you. Well done, sir. You were some kinda strong chap.

YOU DONE GOOD, HARRY

I guess timing is pretty important, and you certainly showed up, at the right places, at exactly the right time, it seems. Did you always have some luck with how things played out like that? What did you learn from the whole roller-coaster ride, and what would you try to pass on to the next generation of performer-types, I wonder? Was it all as much fun as it looked?

I wonder what you'd make of all the celebration now, and being named to this new Hall of Honour. Would it be a big deal to you, or would you have just shrugged it off much like you did most things?

In the end, I'd there's likely nothing that counts as much as the joy you brought to so many people, and the place in their hearts you'll own forever. You done good, Harry. You made us all proud and happy. And we'll never forget, because you left us so much to listen to and love. Every recording, and every photo, and piece of film reminds us of the power of talent, work, and simple pleasures.

God speed – you were always in my book of superstars. See you on the other side. Right on, Snook. ♦

Snook can be reached by emailing: letters@nfldherald.com ... Right on!