

## Entertainment

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## Highway of happiness

Posted By SAL BOMMARITO

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Tom Cochrane fans can expect to hear their favourite tunes when the Canadian rock icon and Order of Canada recipient brings his show to the Sanderson Centre tonight.

Fresh off a trip to Cairo, where he played in front of the pyramids, Cochrane says he won't disappoint his loyal following.

He also emphasizes that he never tires of people asking him about his super hit, *Life is a Highway*.

"In a lot of ways, you give away possession of these songs when they become hits," says Cochrane, who was at his home on Georgian Bay to take time out of his hectic schedule after returning from a one-week "whirlwind" trip to Egypt.

"It's the people who breathe life into these songs. (*Life is a Highway*) is no longer mine. It would be selfish as a performer not to play them. I'm not going to deprive my fans."

Lunatic Fringe, which Cochrane made famous as the lead singer/songwriter of Toronto band Red Rider from 1980-'84, *Big League* and *Setting Like a Sunset*, are also on tonight's play list, says Cochrane.

"Don't get me wrong, with each performance we bring something fresh," he promises.

That "something fresh" will include unplugged performances by Cochrane, who will be backed up by former Red Rider guitarist and keyboardist Ken Greer and percussionist Gary Craig, who has played with Anne Murray and Bruce Cockburn, among other Canadian musical greats.

"I'm going to tell some stories and sing some songs. I love (the Sanderson Centre). When they asked me to perform for their 90th anniversary, I didn't hesitate. The theatre has a lot of history."

Cochrane says fans will love his opening act, Andrew Cole, a young musician who was born in Toronto and raised in Liverpool, England. He moved back to Canada in 2003. Cole released his first full-length CD, which includes the song *We Must Win*, on iTunes this summer.

"This guy has a voice that most singers would die for," Cochrane writes on Cole's website.

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In a wide-ranging interview this week, Cochrane talked about being one of just five performers (the others are Paul McCartney, Elton John, Sting and Andrea Bocelli) to play in front of the pyramids, his many musical accomplishments, career highlights and his commitment to charitable work for World Vision.

During one humorous moment on the Cairo trip, Cochrane says, he was mistaken for pop star Sting.

  
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"We had a dressing tent off to the side. They were bringing in pizza. When they stopped the guy and asked him what he was carrying, he replied: 'Pizza for Sting.' (The trip) was a lot of fun."

On the immense popularity of his mega-hit, *Life is a Highway*, the Lynn Lake, Man., native, whose father was a bush pilot, says: "I'm very lucky to have written the song. It has a lot of power. I love that it makes people happy. That's what I've always tried to achieve with my music: To make people feel less alone by empowering them."

The song's popularity kicked into overdrive after Rascal Flatts covered it for the Disney animated movie *Cars*.

"It's put a lot of fuel in the tour bus. It's a privilege to have a song that has touched so many people. It's an amazing phenomenon."

Cochrane, who began his career performing folk music in coffee houses in Yorkville in the '70s, is gratified that so many of his songs have stood the test of time.

"When I started out, my quest was to write music that was timeless."

Even the "period piece" *White Hot*, which chronicles the story of a poet who becomes a gun runner in Somalia, seems to have struck a lasting chord with his audience.

"The song explains the human condition and what we trade on for success," says Cochrane, who worked as a cab driver in Toronto during the '70s to make ends meet before joining *Red Rider*.

"My songs bring out the spiritual side of people because they come from the right place; they come from the heart."

Cochrane doesn't hesitate when asked to choose a few of his favourite memories from his three-decade-long musical career.

Surprisingly, the first one he mentions is playing at the Vancouver Canucks home-opener last season during a ceremony to honour popular defence-man Luc Bourdon, who was killed in a motorcycle accident at the age of 21.

"It's the small gems of experience that you cherish."

A sold-out show in Victoria in 1991, shortly after the release of his album *Mad Mad World*, which became one of the highest-selling Canadian records of all time, and performing on the same bill as Celine Dion and Joe Cocker for Montreal's 350th birthday celebration in 1992, also stand out as special moments, he says.

With the exception of a short stint in Los Angeles when he was 19, Cochrane's career has been largely spent in Canada, although he has a summer home in Austin, Texas.

His native country has repaid the favour by showering him with well-deserved accolades.

Cochrane received the Order of Canada last year for his musical achievements and his work fighting global poverty. In 2003, he was inducted into the Canadian Music Hall of Fame and will join Canada's Walk of Fame this year.

"I've always been a proud Canadian. Early on, we were encouraged not to talk about (being Canadian). I wasn't going to hide that fact. I was connected with the nuances that make us distinct. We spent so much time driving across this country, sometimes we'd end up sleeping in the back of the station wagon."

While on the road near Thunder Bay in the summer of 1980, Cochrane says the band passed a one-legged runner who would leave a lasting impression on the artist.

"It was Terry Fox. That really hit me like a ton of bricks."

"I've had a lot of experiences in this country and written songs in many provinces and territories. Gordon Lightfoot and the Guess Who never dodged the fact that they were Canadian."

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Tom Cochrane

Sanderson Centre Oct. 1, 8 p. m. Tickets: \$59.50

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