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Cochrane's highway remains pot hole free

Date: 2007-03-27

Author: Paul Rellinger

'The new material has re-energized me. Now I treat each performance like it's my last. Frankly, it's never been so much fun.'

The opening track on Tom Cochrane's latest CD release is The Party's Not Over.

Truer words have rarely been spoken, or sung, when one reflects on the current state of the Manitoba native's fourth decade of performing live.

On Thursday night, a jam-packed Showplace crowd will discover, firsthand, that the party is far from over as the 53-year-old Canadian singer/songwriter serves up a musical menu generously sprinkled with much-loved hits from his Red Rider days and new music from No Stranger.

Tickets to The Wolf 101.5 FM presentation are \$43 at the box office or call 742-7469.

"I used to be very uncomfortable playing in a theatre setting," notes Cochrane by phone, taking a rare break from a busy tour schedule that will see him perform this Saturday at Toronto's revered Massey Hall.

"It feels good now. My concert has a play feel to it that really works well in that setting, both for myself and the audience. I'm looking forward to returning to Peterborough."

While anxious to perform new music from No Stranger -- both Didn't Mean and The Party's Not Over have received considerable radio airplay -- Cochrane is not immune to the general desire to hear the songs that vaulted him to stardom, both with Red Rider and as a solo artist.

"I find the new songs really complement those older songs," says Cochrane.

"I'm not an idiot. People want to hear Life Is A Highway and I really love playing it. They will hear the songs they expect to hear. I have no problem with that and, in fact, welcome it."

It was back in 1977 that Cochrane walked into Toronto's El Mocambo and made his first acquaintance with Red Rider.

What followed was Canadian music history as the new bandmates were signed to Capitol Records and, in 1980, released Don't Fight It with its monster single White Hot and the equally successful title track. By 1988, Red Rider had recorded five more albums and nabbed a 1987 Juno Award as Group of the Year.

"Long before Red Rider, I paid phenomenal dues...I had people screaming for Aerosmith and Led Zeppelin songs."

Shortly after 1989's live Red Rider recording, The Symphony Sessions, was released, Cochrane broke out on his own. In 1990, the humanitarian work, which today he's equally well known for, had its beginnings as Cochrane went to West Africa with his family to raise money and awareness for World Vision.

"It's important, it's incumbent, that musicians use their talent, use their fame, to make a difference in the world...I really believe that," notes Cochrane, who has also been a key player in the Make Poverty History Campaign, is honorary chair of the Parkinson Foundation and, in 2004, visited Canadian troops in Afghanistan.

"All of this is really central to who I am as a person, not just a performer. It's important that we all do something. For me, it makes feel better for who I am. If you can't back up your art, your music doesn't mean anything."

And there lies the enduring appeal of Cochrane. Despite the accolades, including his 2003 induction into the Canadian Music Hall of Fame, and his unabashed support of emerging Canadian musicians such as Sam Roberts, he remains approachable in the eyes of his fans. That persona has been greatly fueled by his obvious pride in his nationality.

"I've never shied away from being a Canadian. We've always had a such a wealth of talent in this country. I'm proud to be a member of that fraternity. It's always been special and still is."

The new album's success, meanwhile, is bringing a smile to Cochrane's face.

"I made it because I wanted to make it...I'm really happy with it," notes Cochrane, who also produced and engineered the album which features former Red Rider members Ken Greer and Jeff Jones.

"As a professional musician, you always want your stuff to be received well, don't get me wrong, but the critics often have a pre-conceived notion of what this or that should sound like. I made it on my terms.

The songs speak to personal experiences, like songs typically do. I'm very, very proud of it.

"Before the Hall of Fame induction, I was thinking pretty seriously about hanging it up. The new material

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Before the hand of fame beckoned, I was thinking pretty seriously about hanging it up. The new material has re-invigorated me. Now I treat each performance like it's my last. Frankly, it's never been so much fun."



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