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Cochrane's ode to courage brings Ryan Smyth to mind

Song was dedicated to former Oilers star

Sandra Sperounes, The Edmonton Journal
Published: Sunday, March 11, 2007

CONCERT PREVIEW
Tom Cochrane & Red Rider
With: Dala

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When: Monday night at 7:30
Where: Winspear Centre
Tickets: Sold out



EDMONTON - When Tom Cochrane performs his ode to courage, Rough and Tumble, on Monday night, there might not be a dry eye in the Winspear.

In the liner notes to his latest album, 2006's No Stranger, the singer-songwriter dedicates the tune to his good friend and former Oiler, Ryan Smyth. (Unfortunately, there's a typo, so it actually reads Regan Smyth.)

"I met him at a golf tournament a few years ago," says Cochrane. "He's just a really good guy, the quintessential courageous Canadian. If you were to go to battle whether it's wherever or on a hockey rink, he's the guy you'd want watching your back. He doesn't seek out glory, he's a pretty humble guy."

While Rough and Tumble wasn't directly inspired by No. 94, Cochrane says he decided to dedicate the tune to Smyth after seeing the gritty forward "spit out a few teeth, then get right back up with no complaining" during last year's playoff run.

"It's a song about how courage is a quiet thing, actions speak louder than words -- and that's Ryan in a nutshell," says Cochrane.

"The first verse is about my first brush with courage when I was a kid and a buddy saved us from a raft from being swept downstream ...

"I also sing about Brendan Murphy, a soldier in Afghanistan who died tragically a few months after I performed for the troops. I'm very supportive of those guys and gals, regardless of your politics or how you feel about things, you've got to support them."

Cochrane seems to have a soft spot for underdogs -- the Oilers, our Canadian troops and Third World children.

He's a staunch supporter of World Vision Canada and travelled to Rwanda with the charity in December.

"The first couple of days were very overwhelming," he says. "We saw evidence of that terrible genocide. We saw a church where thousands of kids had been slaughtered. We saw the skulls of thousands and thousands of people, with gashes from the machetes.

"Then, we saw evidence of tremendous recovery -- people with HIV and AIDS getting their antiviral drugs. We saw evidence of sustained development in villages, where one or two people had gotten gifts like goats, through World Vision's Christmas catalogue, and were feeding their communities. Simple stuff like that. People need to hear those good stories."

One of the songs on Cochrane's new album was inspired by his first World Vision trip to Africa in 1990. The Party's Not Over refers to Louisa, a little girl from Mozambique, who was watching her mother die of starvation.

"I think it's still one of the most powerful experiences of my life," he says. "She looked up at us like, 'What the hell are you guys doing? Save my mother.' We couldn't do anything. We were there with our notepads and our cameras. It was crushing. At that moment, I saw my daughters in her eyes. It was a very powerful, spiritual experience for me."

In a sense, Cochrane is also an underdog -- after more than 20 years in the business.

As a member of Red Rider, he became a Canadian rock star in the '80s, with hits such as White Hot, Lunatic Fringe and Big League.

Then, along came Life Is A Highway from his 1991 solo debut, Mad Mad World, which turned the thoughtful, mild-mannered rocker into an international sensation. He hasn't come close to repeating such success and he admits his first album in eight years isn't selling like the latest starlet's sex tapes.

"I know it hasn't been embraced commercially as well as Mad Mad World," he says.

"That wasn't my intention. It was a record I made from my heart, I had to get it off my chest and that's why it took so long."

Not that Cochrane wants us to cue any violins. He's collecting some nice royalty cheques, thanks to Rascal Flatts, who recorded a country version of Life Is A Highway for Disney/Pixar's Cars. Last month, Cochrane performed the song with the superstars at Rexall Place.

"I tell ya, it was like the seventh game of the Stanley Cup finals. My ears are still ringing from that show. I was so flattered they covered Life Is A Highway. The song just keeps on ticking and they're going to put a few tanks of gas in the tour bus for me," he says.

"I love to see really nice people succeed and these guys are really down to earth. They're great guys."

Just like Ryan Smyth -- no matter how much money he was asking. Cochrane admits he was shocked and saddened by No. 94's recent trade to the New York Islanders, but he's able to joke about it.

"I never thought I'd become an Islanders fan," he quips. "I'm sure they're treating Ryan great."

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COCHRANE CLIPS
Listen to songs from Tom Cochrane's latest CD, No Stranger.
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