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Welcome to Scrolling Eye

BY MARC WEISBLOTT January 02, 2008 23:01

Today on the Scroll: Tom Cochrane has a hit at the Iowa Caucuses; online tirades from Tal Bachman; middle-aged Gen X journalist returns to publication after 10-year "lost weekend."

Tom Cochrane admits to not having followed much of the prelude to the 2008 American presidential election's primary season. But a song he wrote has been following several candidates around.

Cochrane's 1991 hit "Life is a Highway," as covered by country act Rascal Flatts, was cited in a *Wall Street Journal* story sizing up candidate playlists. Republican rivals Mitt Romney and Rudolph Giuliani have both used the songs to rally potential caucus voters in Iowa. Giuliani used Cochrane's original in Pearl, Mississippi, according to a *New York Times* blog, but shifted allegiances to the theme from the football flick *Rudy* when he moved his campaign flitilla to Florida.

This was all news to Cochrane, reached at home in Oakville, who'd only caught wind that the tune was being used by a candidate from the other side: Hillary Clinton. And that merited mention on an *ABC News Political Radar* report, too.

"I really like Barack Obama," says Cochrane. "That's who I'd probably vote for. But you also can't not like Giuliani for what he did to rah-rah people after 9/11, it was a fundamentally sweet thing."

Fine, but this is the first interview for this new online column, and it wouldn't hurt traffic to snag a money quote that can ricochet across the American political blogosphere. Why can't Tom just think of something unpleasant to say about Mitt Romney? *Everyone* else can.

"I know what you're trying to get out of me," demurs Cochrane after being asked the same question five different ways. "You're doing the typical journalist thing."

So, while Tom Petty managed to get GOP candidate John McCain to stop using "I Won't Back Down" as his anthem, just by complaining about its misappropriation, Cochrane doesn't plan on censuring those who use his tune, inspired by a World Vision junket to Africa: "If I was to go around to everybody who was using it at a rally or party, that would take up 80 per cent of my time."

Cochrane admits to bristling a bit when he learned "Life Is a Highway" was being used for Stephen Harper's campaign, but felt fine about it after learning Harper's wife Laureen was fond of the song.

Hard to imagine these musical choices are as genuine inside the American campaign bubble, where every candidate is consulted to a fault, and an army of online pundits now dissect their gestures. (Like when Hillary Clinton recently traded Celine Dion for Big Head Todd and The Monsters as her primary anthem.)

As for Mitt Romney, who's catching flak for his membership in the Mormon Church in the years when it was a technically *racist* organization, Cochrane is fine with the association even if he doesn't swing that way. "He's entitled to have his beliefs, so long as they're not breaking the law, or saying incendiary things."

Compared to, say, David Duke, the ex-Ku Klux Klan leader who used Bryan Adams' "(Everything I Do) I Do It For You" as his campaign theme song when running for governor of Louisiana in 1991, in spite of Adams' protestations.

"Look, I've been known to speak out for human rights," says Cochrane. "And I've done a hell of a lot more in that regard than Bryan Adams ever has. We once had the same manager, and he chastised me for being too topical."

Cochrane is sharing stages across Canada in February with John Mellencamp, whose song "Our Country" was originally heard in a Chevy truck commercial, now the anthem for Democratic hopeful John Edwards. They can compare notes about whose music has done more to influence America.

"Just make sure to mention that Hillary has used it, too."