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REVIEW

Tyson lowers lights, lets us into his cowboy world

BY ROBERT REID
RECORD STAFF

GUELPH

Ian Tyson wrote his first song in 1961 during a rainy afternoon in his manager's New York apartment as a challenge to himself.

If Bobby Dylan could write songs, so could he, he reasoned.

As it turned out, Four Strong Winds proved both prophesy and legacy.

"The arrogance of youth," he noted with a chuckle while introducing the enduring classic to kick off his second set Wednesday night at the River Run Centre.

It was the legendary singer-songwriter's third appearance since 2000.

Tyson, who celebrated his 74th birthday six weeks ago, drew material from his impressive songbook spanning almost half a century.

He performed *Someday Soon*, also written in New York in the early 1960s and a big hit for Judy Collins, in the



PROMOTIONAL
Ian Tyson had nearly 50 years of songwriting to cull from at Guelph's River Run Centre on Wednesday.

first set, and served up *Summer Wages* after returning in response to a standing ovation for the first of his two-song encore.

Most of the concert, however, show-

cased songs post-Cowboyography, the 1986 watershed album "that changed my life," he acknowledged when introducing *50 Years Ago*.

When Tyson finally moved to Alberta and bought a ranch in the late 1970s, his dream of a cowboy life became reality and his destiny as a cowboy troubadour was fulfilled.

One of a dying breed, his life as a cowboy has been the primary source of his music since the release of *Old Corals & Sagebrush* in 1983.

His songs not only embody and enact the remnants of cowboy culture, they chronicle a vanishing way of life.

Equal parts celebration and elegy, his songs bear witness to a Western lifestyle under siege from the hostile forces of modernity.

Their artistry ensures they will outlast the way of life they so eloquently commemorate.

Wearing a white stetson, pearl buttoned shirt and blue jeans, Tyson was accompanied by the two Gord's (both

named after his old pal Gordon Lightfoot).

Gord Matthews handled acoustic lead guitar, while Gord Maxwell played electric bass. Both provided tight harmony vocals that complemented Tyson's burnished baritone.

Tyson aimed for an intimate concert (he was constantly asking technicians to lower the lights) and his introductions were short, but they painted an evocative picture of the West, past and present.

The first set featured *This Is My Sky* and *Land of Shining Mountains* from *Songs from the Gravel Road*, his latest album released in 2005, in addition to *Smugglers Cove* (a tribute to his father), *Somewhere in the Rubies* (a tribute to his daughter), *Springtime in Alberta*, *Navajo Rug* (co-written with Tom Russell) and the cowpoke rap number *Jerry Amber*, which showcased Maxwell's slapping bass.

He also covered Rodgers and Hart's 1934 chestnut *Blue Moon*.

The second set featured *I Outgrew the Wagon*, *La Primera*, *The Roan Mare* (with Matthews on slide guitar), *Horseshief Moon* (which he dedicated to Fred Eaglesmith) and the cowpoke jazz number *Love Without End*.

Tyson has penned some wonderful song portraits. He performed a handful, including Casey Tibbs, Bob Fudge and *The Gift* (a tribute to the great Western painter Charlie Russell), in addition to Jerry Ambler.

He ended with the cowpoke reggae number *Magpie*.

Tyson is a consummate professional. He never shortchanges an audience.

Still, he conveys the sense that he'd rather be back at the ranch.

He informed the audience he would sign any CDs that people purchased. When a lady replied that the CDs were sold out, he quipped: "That's good. That's why we do this."

I guess part of being a legend is honesty.

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PERFECTLY *in toon*

Annual animation festival attracts entries from all over the world and pushes the boundaries of imagination and good taste

BY COLIN HUNTER
RECORD STAFF

Picture this: a world inhabited by two-dimensional creatures is invaded by hostile beings from the third dimension.

It's not an easy thing to envision (especially for the poor 2D creatures, whose flat minds would be boggled by the notion of depth).

It would be an even trickier scenario to recreate in a live-action film, given the wonky geometry involved.

In animation, however, anything is possible — even pan-dimensional battle.

Which is precisely why Joseph Chen, founder of the Waterloo Festival for Animated Cinema, is so fascinated by the genre.

"Animation is the only unlimited filmmaking method," says Chen, who has acquired 15 films for the seventh annual festival, which officially begins Thursday, Nov. 15 at The Gig Theatre in Kitchener.

"Animation is a direct translation of the mind's eye onto the visual screen."

The vision for an inter-dimensional conflict, for example, came from the mind's eye of filmmaker Ladd Ehlinger Jr., whose film *Flatland* is an eye-popping realization of an 1884 satiric novella of the same name.

Flatland will be a highlight of this year's festival for a couple of reasons: first, Ehlinger will be on hand for a Q&A after the screening. Second, the screening itself will be simulcast live on the festival's website, www.wfac.ca, for anyone to see.

The webcast is an "exciting experiment" for the festival, Chen says, and one he hopes will set a standard

for other film festivals.

"We wanted to share this film festival experience with the Internet and, in theory, the world."

It's a grand idea for a festival that started as a small event hosted by the University of Waterloo's animation fan club, CTRL-A (Club That Really Likes Anime). In the six years since then, the festival has become one of the largest of its kind in North America.

This year's lineup has been culled from around the world and features a broad range of animated films, from family-friendly fairy tales such as *The Ugly Duckling* and *Me* to gritty adult crime dramas like *Film Noir*.

Several films this year stretch the boundaries of imagination and good taste. *Free Jimmy*, for instance, follows the exploits of four stoners, five vegans, one drug-crazed elephant in a Russian circus and a bewildered moose.

Another film for mature audiences (due to some immature themes) is *Achi and Ssipak*, about a dystopian post-oil economy dependent on a repugnant alternative fuel — human waste.

"We'll be checking IDs," Chen says of the more grown-up films.

A series of films aimed at younger audiences will be screened tomorrow and Sunday during a free festival preview at the Waterloo Region Children's Museum.

"The film festival's goal is to show how animation can span every level of the storytelling form," Chen says.

"We're now seeing things in animation that cannot be done in live-action film. Animation has no boundaries."

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OTTO DESENHOS ANIMADOS

Otto Guerra's *Wood & Stock: Sex, Oregon and Rock 'n' Roll* (Brazil, 2006) is about hippies trying to survive the modern world.



PROMOTIONAL

Top: A sphere and a square float in the sinister scooter in *Flatland*, Ladd Ehlinger Jr.'s eye-popping realization of an 1884 satiric novella of the same name.

Above: *One Night In The City* (Jan Balej, Czech Republic) is a stop-motion puppet animation entry and one of the festival's dark comedy features.

SCHEDULE

Cinema Waterloo Region Children's Museum

Tomorrow and Sunday: 12:30 p.m. and 3 p.m.: *Case Closed*, *The Wings of Honneamise*, *The Wolf Brigade*.

The Gig Theatre

Nov. 15:
6:30 p.m. — *The Pixar Story*
9 p.m. — *Tidbits 1*

Nov. 16:
6:30 p.m. — *Rocky and Hudson*
9 p.m. *Achi and Ssipak*

Nov. 17:
10 a.m. — *The Ugly Duckling and Me*

12:30 p.m. — *RH+*: the *Vampiress of Seville*
3 p.m. *Tidbits 2*

6:30 p.m. — *Flatland*
9 p.m. — *One Night In The City*
11:30 p.m. — *Film Noir*

Nov. 18:
1:30 p.m. — *Wood & Stock: Sex, Oregon and Rock 'n' Roll*
4:30 p.m. — *Free Jimmy*

FESTIVAL

Waterloo Festival for Animated Cinema

■ The Gig Theatre, 157 Ontario St., N.

Tickets

■ \$10; \$7 (12-under) or full pass \$75; \$40 (12-under).
■ at centre in the Square, UW Humanities Theatre or at door
■ www.wfac.ca

Lights is just football fiction but so true to life

Forget football. If it does one thing better than any show in recent memory, *Friday Night Lights* (9 p.m. on NBC, Global) — a critical darling that has never drawn the audience it deserves — proves that within every awkward, stumbling, tongue-tied teenage doofus whose brawn seems bigger than his brain lies the heart and soul of a poet.

"Hey, so did Julie tell you we're hanging out this weekend?" the shy, fumbling quarterback (Zach Gilford) of a Texas high school football team asks the coach's wife, whose daughter — his ex-girlfriend — cheated on him but now wants to get back together.

"Um hmmm!" says Tami Taylor (Connie Britton), who doesn't want to get involved. "I *did* know about that!"

The quarterback nods uncertainly. "That should be fine!" he stammers, obviously conflicted.

"That should be *great!*" says Tami, fidgeting restlessly with a baby in one hand, bag of groceries in the other. "That should be good!"

She looks awkward. Is the conversa-



JOEL RUBYNOFF
TELEVISION

tion over? Can she please leave? "You don't think I'm a chump, do you, for going out with her again?" continues the clueless football star, unsure how he feels about it himself. "For hanging out with her again?"

Mrs. Taylor looks panicked, aware she's being drawn into a conversation she wants no part of: "I don't . . . y 'know, it doesn't matter. It's important what *you* think — that's the most important thing!"

"I think I miss her!" says Matt.

"Um hmmm!" says the coach's wife, inching slowly toward the door.

"I mean, I *know* I miss her . . ." he hesitates, desperate for guidance.

The coach's wife continues backing away: "Well, you know, it's an awkward position for me to, um, but . . ."

"Yeah," says the quarterback.

"Listen, y'know," she offers tentatively. "I just think the most important thing in a relationship is trust — it's pretty much the most important thing."

It goes on like this for another minute or so — awkward, horrifying but touchingly vulnerable — with the coach's wife doing her best to avoid saying anything that might come back to haunt her and the angst-ridden jock earnestly probing her for advice on his love life.

What, you may think, is so great about a conversation that so closely mimics the rhythms of real life it may make you squirm with recognition?

What's so great about similar interactions between clumsy, woefully inarticulate teenagers determined to express the hearts they display so openly on the football field and the determined parents — and coach (Kyle Chandler) — who nudge them on their way to adulthood while grappling with their own flawed relationships?

"To me, it's the lifeblood of the

show," producer Jason Katims told me at the recent TV press tour in Los Angeles. "The show has for a backdrop this small town and high school football and the town's obsession with that, but to me it's about this marriage, relationships, parents trying to figure out how to raise their kids, teenagers figuring out sexuality and issues about race and class and all those things."

It's about life, in other words, and during a news conference with 200 TV critics from across North America, the cast and crew made it clear the No. 1 hardship in marketing this show is that people think it's just about football.

"We're not saying it's *not* about football," stressed Katims. "But we think it's a show for everybody!"

Hey, let me tell you — I'm no athlete. In high school I was the quivering doofus wandering around the locker-room with a giant wedgie — a pox upon my tormenters! — but this show speaks to me as well, and part of the reason is because it's so nuanced, earthy and be-

lievable it actually transcends its jock-itch subject matter.

There are no Mensa-level Woody Allen clones waxing philosophical as they did on *The O.C.*, no Maxim supermodels posing and preening as they do on *Laguna Beach* and *The Hills*.

These are real people — even if they are fictional — and there's a certain exhilaration that comes from seeing something that feels authentic on your TV screen, no matter what the backdrop.

"This isn't a show that overplays all the drama," points out Scott Porter, who plays paralyzed player Jason Street. "It's a show based on real characters and a real town."

CHANNEL SURFING

• Kermit the Frog shows up to trade quips with contestants on a green-themed episode of *Deal or No Deal* (8 p.m. on NBC, E!).

• A small town cop has a *Twin Peaks* experience on the homegrown drama *Rabbit Fall* (7:30 p.m. on APTN).

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