

**BILL HENDERSON****From Sesame Street to Legend Estates**• *by Dan Brisebois*

Bill Henderson has been at the forefront of the Canadian music scene since the mid 60's. As a studio musician on the CBC's "Music Hop" program, he gained allies in the industry that would lead to the formation of The Collectors, and then Chilliwack, one of the most influential rock groups in Canadian music history, and one of the defining sounds of the West Coast invasion in the '70's.

His outside projects have included working with Roy Forbes and Shari Ulrich in UHF, as well as becoming a Juno-award winning producer, working with the likes of **The Irish Rovers**, Junior Gone Wild, and Long John Baldry, among others. He also made one of the stranger leaps, by rock and roll standards at least, by working on Sesame Street in the 90's.

DB: What did the CBC show, "Music Hop" do for your career, and what was its importance to Canadian music at the time?

BH: Basically what it did for the band, it had three or four of the members who became the Collectors meet. That show was really, fairly important. For a lot of players, they could see what was going on across the country. For the bands it was a really cool thing, they could see what was going on in other towns, who the other players were, what they were doing."

DB: What's been the most satisfying album you've done?

BH: I don't know if there was just one. But there have been a few I could name. The first two Collectors records, for sure. Those were the first two I'd recorded, so they were just hugely important to me, and I learned a tremendous amount. And the first Chilliwack album, we recorded that in 36 hours, recorded and mixed, the whole thing. We'd never done that before, or since.

DB: How has your music evolved over the years?

BH: It can't help but evolve. It has to evolve. You can't just do the same thing over and over.

DB: What were some of your influences?

BH: I've just always heard many different kinds of music, and they all played their part. In the beginning with The Collectors, I was right out of university and I heard a lot of very avant-garde stuff, as well as my background in folk, and in rock, and in jazz. They were all there too, so I had all those experiences to bring to it. I had no experience with blues at that time, and not much with rock, very little actually. And when I heard what all the San Francisco bands were doing, they were a huge influence on me as well, The Grateful Dead, Jefferson Airplane, Steve Miller Band, Big Brother and The Holding Company, what they were doing in those bands was very, very inspiring to me.

And at the end of The Collectors, we played a couple of nights with Albert King at the Fillmore East. He was actually recording a live album those nights. Hearing him play, I'd never heard anything like that before. I'd heard some blues stuff before, but I'd never heard anyone make it speak like that before. It was just so simple, and so powerful, that it shook up my bag of tricks quite a lot. And I ended up being very influenced by that. "Rain-O" sort of came out of that whole experience. Other things that happened in the evolution of the band, I think the Eagles were a bit of an influence in the mid '70's for the band, and Hall & Oates were a bit of an influence in the '80's.

DB: What's kept it fun for so long?

BH: I just love doing it. I love doing music, and I love performing for people. That's my favourite part, is the live performance. Doing records is fun, but performing live is really where it's at. There's something about going up in front of a bunch of people, it's pretty much scary every time, and a bit nerve-wracking a bit. And resolving that, and giving them all a great time, and us having a great time ourselves, that's really what it's all about. At the end of the gig, I feel fantastic! There's nothing I do that I enjoy more.

DB: How'd the live album, THERE & BACK come about?

BH: We recorded about 25 different shows, just taking our recording gear out on the road, and just chose the best stuff.

DB: What's new on the horizon?

BH: We've got a new song we play, it's called "Patent On The Wind." It's about the ownership of life, which is really something kind of odd that's coming out of the genetic engineering, bio-engineering world. The song was inspired by a ten year-old court battle between a Saskatchewan and a bio engineering company. In the end the company won, and one of the things that came out of the court case was they indeed owned a form of life. It's not a walking, talking form of life, it's a kind of canola. But walking, talking things eat it. It's a rocker, kind of a protest song, it's kind of got a little bit of that old San Francisco kind of sound to it.

DB: You've recorded more gold records than I can count, you've won Junos for production work ... What's left for you to do?

BH: I think what I want to do is, I want to write music about things that I think are important. And not all are political important, there's also life important, love is important. So I'll continue to write songs about love. But there are other things as well. I just want to create songs that I feel are saying something deep that I feel, that I believe. I think in this day and age, with the world going absolutely crackers, people have got to stand up and say things that are important.

It's important to say it's wrong for us to be in Afghanistan, and it's wrong for the US to be doing what they're doing in Iraq. It's not just Osama that's wrong. Yes, he's wrong, but it's not just Osama. Let's look at what we're doing. There are some things that need to be said, and they really desperately need to be said. There seems to be a lot of people afraid to say anything. And I don't want to be one of those people afraid to say anything.

There are some love songs that are very meaningful, that are very important, very deep. Leonard Cohen's written a few, there's been lots of great love songs written, and I'm happy to write great love songs. I just want to write great songs, and I want to talk about certain things that need to be said. If I can say it in a song, I will. And if I can't, I'll say it in other ways.

DB: How did UHF come about?

BH: We were kind of a child of the Waker Roots Festival in 1989. They wanted to put three kind of known performers together, and see what happens. They phoned up Roy and Sherri and asked if they'd like to do it, and would they mind picking out a third person. They mentioned me, and we got together. And it's been wonderful working with them. They're such beautiful musicians, they really know how to make music, and it's really fun playing with them.

DB: Who's been your single most inspiring person, getting into music? Who made you say, 'I want to pick up that guitar'?

BH: I don't remember who it was. I remember when it happened tho. I remember being in a car and hearing an electric guitar on the radio. I asked my Dad, "What's that?" It was in the 50's, and I imagine it was probably a rockabilly record, maybe an Elvis record. I've always loved that sound. Elvis' guitar player, Scottie Moore, I loved the sounds he made, the sounds Gene Vincent made, Chet Atkins ... those sounds, I don't know which one it was, but it was one of those, I heard it on the radio, and it just made me want to do it.

DB: Tell me about the other guys.

BH: The guys I have in the band are great, great players. They're just solid as a rock, and they smoke.

- Doug Edwards; *bass*: "He wrote the song, "Wildflower." He knows the groove, he's the groovemaster. He plays the right notes at the right time, the guy's got incredible feel."
- Jerry Adolphe; *drums*: "He's a 'first call' drummer in western Canada for sessions, and he's a monster, it's the only way to describe him. Makes everyone else sound good, keeps things in time. He's just an incredible drummer."
- Ed Henderson; *guitars*: "He's a brilliant guitar player, not just because he's my brother. He'll do some things in a show that are pretty spectacular with the acoustic guitar ... then of course, you have me!"

Our objective every night is to get off. If you'll pardon the old 60's expression, to 'get high' off the music. If that doesn't happen, then we're not happy. That's what we're there for. But when we achieve that, the same thing happens with the audience, and everybody shares in it.

DB: What artist or group that you've never worked with, would you most like to?

BH: Maybe Neil Young. He was an inspiration to me too. When we got started with The Collectors, he was just like 6 months ahead with Buffalo Springfield, right around the same time. I remember seeing him on TV, and then we played with them a few times, too. I just loved his approach, I liked the way he just kind of slipped on the stage. He wasn't all wrapped up in the music industry myth. He was challenging to what was going on around. He wanted something to happen, that night, right then, right there. He wanted something to happen that really meant something, and I always felt that way myself. And he's managed to have an incredibly long career, and managed to keep that kind of vibe happening that whole time. I like his musical instincts, I like the shit he writes, and he's so experimental.

DB: You were on Sesame Street? Tell me the story.

BH: I was the Musical Director for Sesame Street Canada, Western Region for six years. I guess it was from around '90 to '96. I had a very brief world band that I'd put together called Dream Time. That was around '88, '89. We had a whole bunch of songs, some of them made it to the first UHF album, none of them have been played by Chilliwack. The Sesame Street producer came and heard us one night. She phoned me up and asked if I wanted to work on this. My kids watched Sesame Street, and I'd watched it with them a fair bit, and I thought it was great. We started working together, and it was a lot of fun. How can you not have fun doing Sesame Street?

DB: Let's badmouth Canadian radio's lack of interest and airplay of Canadian rock.

BH: Being in the classic rock genre, I get a lot more airplay than young artists. I think Canadian radio feels its safe to play our stuff. Of course, I appreciate them playing our stuff. It's very helpful to me, and I think it's good stuff. I'm not ashamed of it being on the air, so I'm kind of in the middle on that one. I'm on the SOCAN board, and we pay pretty close attention to what Canadian radio does, and many, if not most of the stations, play more than the Canadian quota. But at the same time, they make a big, big fuss about how much Canadian content is hurting their business. To critique Canadian radio, I think the critique really goes not to the radio stations, who are generally playing more than they're required to play, but to the Canadian Ass'n of Broadcasters. They maintain that they're all doing very badly, or would be doing so much better if they weren't playing Canadian music. It's just not true.

It's weird. There's just a goldmine of Canadian songs they could play, but stations really aren't doing that. I think they're really selling themselves short, as well as Canadian music. They could be creative, inventive programmers that get listeners excited, they could really do a number.

DB: What's Bill Henderson's lasting legacy to Canadian music?

BH: I don't think that's for Bill Henderson to answer. How in the hell would I know? I know what I think of what I've done. I think I did all kinds of great shit. But I'm not my own audience. It's my audience that defines what I've done, and where it fits. They're the ones that really make those decisions. And I just try to make them happy, and they treat me well.

