

Canadian singing stars preserve wealth

By Michael Lawson
Canadian Press staff writer

Burton Cummings once lost a \$60,000 cheque but did not realize it until the cheque turned up eight months later. A broken fingernail once cost Gordon Lightfoot at least \$20,000.

Incidents like these are the meat and potatoes of gossip columns but they offer a starvation diet to gossip mongers in this country. Canada's most successful entertainers do not play by their rules.

Isn't it generally understood that the showbiz wealthy — particularly the youth-oriented sector — are foolishly flamboyant with finances, indulging every expensive whim?

In the United States the gossip press is full of juicy tidbits about a raven-haired vamp who spends bundles on manicures and has enough shoes to outfit a WAC regiment; about a mellow-voiced crooner who has added a lake to the swimming pool and two tennis courts in his garden; about a member of a popular vocal group who owned five Rolls Royces before his 21st birthday — and demolished them before he was much older.

The truth is, Canada's music elite is dull. Those who have made millions



Gordon Lightfoot
Scrapped project



Anne Murray
Basic tastes



Burton Cummings
Millionaire at 20

are few in number — seem to live sensibly.

Rarely does an item emerge such as the one about Cummings's elusive royalty cheque, which he found under his bed.

Or the one about Lightfoot's fingernail. The folk-singer broke a nail before a week-long engagement at Toronto's Massey Hall in 1974, an engagement that cost him between \$20,000 and \$25,000 to tape for a live recording. But during the subsequent mixing process Lightfoot decided that the synthetic nail with which he strummed his guitar during the concerts delivered a flawed sound on tape. He scrapped the project.

image is often larger than life, such celebrities generally shrink from the inquisitive press when the topic turns to lifestyle, flamboyant or otherwise.

Some, notably Neil Young and Joni Mitchell, avoid interviews altogether. The more accessible artists usually confine their comments to their work.

Alex Lifeson, Neil Peart and Geddy Lee, better known as the band Rush, have parlayed eight years of sweat and heavy metal into millions of dollars and today the three Toronto musicians are living comfortably. And characteristically, they fend off the media's curiosity about their wealth.

estate, some of it in hometown Ottawa.

Cummings, too, has invested much of his earnings wisely. In the late '60s, when he and the Guess Who were riding high internationally, the Winnipeg rock group had joint holdings in everything from chicken franchises to shopping plazas.

Cummings, now a successful solo artist, is still drawing royalties from the Guess Who years, having co-written most of the band's material with Randy Bachman.

Among his possessions are two fine homes, one overlooking a canyon in Hollywood, the other a 21-room mansion in Winnipeg. And, although he still rents his trademark white Steinway grand piano, he owns a number of other instruments, including an upright piano, guitars, saxophones, flutes and "my expensive toys" — several synthesizers.

Anne Murray's situation is somewhat unusual in that her considerable wealth has come mainly through her talent as a performer — she doesn't write music. But like Anka, Murray today is much in demand worldwide. Leonard Rambeau, president of her Balmur management and publish-

place in the Thornhill area north of Metropolitan Toronto, may bespeak wealth, but Rambeau noted that Murray doesn't wear the wealth on her sleeve.

She drives a solidly middle-class Volvo station wagon, "not even a Mercedes."

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Guitarist Lifeson noted in an interview that people generally have a misguided image of rock musicians. The life — especially the roadwork — is far from glamorous, and the financial rewards are neither plentiful nor easily won.

"A great deal of touring throughout the year is necessary if a band is to get any kind of name at all, and that's an expensive proposition. We have close to 30 people on the road with us so there's a lot of dollars involved."

Although Rush has been a mainstay of Canadian music almost from its beginning, Lifeson said it took four or five years of hard work before the group could pay off the bills for its equipment.

Break even

"It wasn't really until this last tour (of European and American cities) that we sort of broke even and managed to put away a little bit to cover these two months that we're off the road."

The people who benefit most from these sales are the songwriters, whose credit on a single hit tune will net them a small fortune in royalties. Both Paul Anka and Cummings were millionaires by age 20, thanks to their frequently played compositions.

Anka, in fact, still earns between \$20,000 and \$30,000 a year just for his *Tonight Show* theme, which has heralded Johnny Carson's entrance for the last 15 years.

But the bulk of his millions comes from the dozens of hit tunes that he recorded himself over a 23-year career, and the ones he tailored exclusively for such artists as Frank Sinatra (*My Way*) and Tom Jones (*She's a Lady*).

With the respect he has earned in the music industry, Anka can command top dollars in Las Vegas, where he has one of three residences. And many of those dollars are sensibly invested in real

ing firm, says her asking price for a performance jumped 20 per cent two years ago when she won a Grammy Award, the Oscar of the American music industry.

interview that the singer has basic tastes and a down-to-earth lifestyle.

"Her idea of luxury is having the kind of kitchen she wants, the drapes that appeal to her, a comfortable home," he said. That home, a large, fashionable

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