

Me, Bryan Adams and the CRTC

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A little over a year ago, Bryan Adams kicked off his Canadian tour by holding a press conference in Sydney, Nova Scotia. At this meeting, Adams condemned the CRTC regulations about the percentage of Canadian Content that radio stations (in particular) must play. His comments arose from the recent ruling that the *Waking Up the Neighbors* album did not meet the minimum requirements of the CRTC- the album doesn't count as Canadian content, and the airplay it might receive in Canada was severely limited by this decision. Adams said that the CRTC rules fostered a mediocre music scene in Canada.

Now, whether or not one thinks that Adams was just upset over his own situation, or whether he genuinely developed these opinions over the course of his career, his comments did spark a debate that still echoes through the Canadian media. At the time, prominent Canadian musicians, such as Anne Murray and Murray McLaughlin, supported Adams; younger musicians, including members of 54-40, fought against him. And the matter was recently discussed on January 16, 1993: on *Friday Night With Ralph Benmergui*. The host asked Jim Cuddy and Greg Keelor of Blue Rodeo what they thought of Adams' comments. They as much as called Adams a moron, saying that the Canadian music scene was not mediocre at all. Then, they backed this up with a knock-out performance of a new song featuring Andrew Cash.

The matter is indeed complex. The CRTC says that, of the material played on radio stations, one-third must be Canadian. This "Canadianness", however, is not arbitrarily decided- the CRTC breaks the matter down along the following lines: music, artist, producer and lyrics. At least two of these four categories must have been performed by a Canadian for a piece of music to count as Canadian content. Bryan Adams didn't fill this minimum requirement because he co-wrote the music and lyrics with someone who was not Canadian, hence, the whole work was deemed "not Canadian", Adams got mad, and I have something to write for the *Argosy*, a year later.

There are two subtle elements that, I think, are informing Adam's view without being up front about the issues. Both of these influences arise from exposure to the music business in countries other than Canada. The first thing is that lots of countries do not have the same sort of government protection for their young artists, yet their music scenes do change and thrive. In light of this, one could ask whether the CRTC is playing a valuable, or even necessary, role with regard to the development of Canadian music. Secondly, Canadian acts that get a lot of airplay in Canada- Blue Rodeo, The Tragically Hip- manage to go unnoticed in a lot of other countries. If this is the case for these bands, what about *NomeansNo*, the *Rheostatics*, *Change of Heart*, and the like? Is the Canadian music scene indeed mediocre, like Adams sug-

gested? if he was a fan, and he replied yes- he and about twenty other people showed up for a Hip concert in Glasgow. He had not heard of *Fully Completely* yet. Neither he nor Abigail, another of my cousins, had heard of *Blue Rodeo*. The situation is this- the BBC voluntarily plays British music played by bands without record contracts- music that is vastly inferior to that made by *The Tragically Hip* or *Blue Rodeo*. Yet these better Canadian bands do not have much of a niche in the UK, except in a fairly extreme alternative sense. My cousins knew about Leonard Cohen and Bryan Adams, but not about too many Canadian bands. Does this lend credence to Adam's charges that the music scene in this country is mediocre?

In my opinion, Adams is wrong about both the CRTC and Canadian music in general. Canadian music is both interesting and entertaining, and the CRTC plays an important role in the music business. In a way, it comes down to politics and national identity. Every work of art, once released for public consideration,

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gested?

I'm asking these questions because I spent two weeks in Scotland this Christmas. This gave me a chance to listen to some different radio, to get a look at a different music scene, and also to chat with a couple of cousins about this stuff.

So far as I know, the UK does not have regulations like Canada's. Yet, there is definitely a thriving British music scene. Scotland seems especially hard on its own bands- Jim Reid of the *Jesus and Mary Chain* has blasted the city of Glasgow for the treatment the band received in earlier days. Yet *Annie Lennox*, *Teenage Fanclub*, *Eugenius*, *Nazareth*, and lots of others are Scottish. Moreover, radios do not play unsigned bands to help them out. During my vacation, I listened to one of the BBC stations play mediocre Glasgow metal bands in a weekly listener phone-in contest, and as far as I know, the BBC does not have to do this. Can you imagine Canadian radio stations and Canadian audiences voluntarily playing new Canadian artists? What's the difference between the two countries?

My Scottish cousin Neil happened to bring up the *Tragically Hip* conversation. I asked him

functions on a political level. Art works are both the expression and creation of differences: I look at a piece of music or a book or whatever, and I think, "it's like this, but not like that", or, "It comes from this angle, and attacks this", or, "I can associate with this", meaning that there is something different from this that I can't or won't handle in the same way. Each person experiences an art work from an individual perspective that is shaped by a variety of contexts. Each art work is created from the same sort of position. Is there such a thing as a universally appealing or repelling artwork? I don't think so. This means that art works divide- and, in a general sort of way, division implies politics. The opposition of one group or perspective to another, in either a formal or informal way, is the realm of politics. In fact, the same issue can be treated in politically formal or informal ways by different people at the same time. I'm voicing my opinions about music- I'm just interested in considering a few things and hearing how other people see the same matter. Yet the CRTC has explicit guide-

continued on page 20