

A black and white photograph of Ian Tyson, a cowboy, standing next to a dark horse. He is wearing a cowboy hat, a denim jacket, and fringed chaps. He has his right hand on the horse's neck. The background is a wooden fence.

Ian Tyson LEGEND

Words by Mike Laughlin.

Photo © Kurt Markus.

Ian Tyson is authentic and durable—one of the greatest cowboy singers and songwriters in North America. His songs are about cattle, horses and real cowboys and buckaroos.

Ian has had two distinctly brilliant careers, spanning four decades. His first started as part of the legendary folk duo of Ian & Silvia in the 1960s. Since the early '90s, he has enjoyed great success at western songwriting and singing.

Performing recently at the famed Hamley's Slick Fork Saloon in Pendleton, Ore., during the 2008 Pendleton PRCA Rodeo Roundup, Ian said: "I always wanted to be a cowboy, not a songwriter or a singer—a cowboy. I just got lucky in the music business. When I was a kid growing up in British Columbia, we used to listen to Wilf Carter, sometimes called Montana Slim, on the radio. Wilf was a big deal in Canadian western music in those days. At that time, I did not know how to play a guitar nor did I understand that those songs we listened to were western folk songs."

When he was 19 years old, he caught the rodeo fever and tried his hand at riding bareback horses. "I acquired an old Dixon bareback rigging and cracked out in the Canadian rodeo circuit. Going down the rodeo road several months later, a bareback horse threw me and stepped on my ankle, shattering the anklebone. While in the hospital recovering, I borrowed a guitar from a kid who was in the room a couple of beds away from me and I started trying to learn to play."

Ian believes real cowboys are interesting to write songs about because they are furiously independent and live in a closed horseback society. This has always fascinated him.

Around 1981, he met photographer and writer Kurt Markus and they became friends. Ian had cowboied some in Canada but where Kurt took him—to the Great Basin ranches in Oregon and Nevada—cowboying was a whole different deal. This country was huge,

the people were few, and the buckaroos camped with their horses and cattle out on the range. They ate at a chuck wagon and slept in tepees. They packed pistols and trotted out each morning 15 to 20 miles to work cattle. This experience just blew him away.

When Ian was invited to the Cowboy Poetry Gathering, which started in 1984 in Elko, Nev., he met authentic cowboys there who were singing and reciting cowboy poetry. It was a natural progression. Ian thought, "I can write that way." He put out his album, "Cowboyography," his first view of modern contemporary cowboy life. This album went gold in Canada and is closing in on platinum, an astonishing feat for an album that is really only understood by perhaps no more than a thousand real working cowboys throughout Canada and the United States. Many people wish to identify with the cowboy even if, as Ian says, "they do not know which end of the cow gets up first."

Ian explains why working cowboys related to his music. "They knew I'd been there. These guys can spot a wannabe a long way off. I understood their way of life. I had fed cattle in a blizzard and doctored sick calves in the spring on the feed ground." He wanted to be the voice for the working cowboys who couldn't relate to the Nashville "urban cowboys." Soon his music had a huge cult following in the ranching world.

William Matthews, noted western artist, sums up best what Ian means to the ranching community. At the 2008 gathering, he said:

"What all of us in this room, who have come from all over the country, have in common is that we all have Ian Tyson CDs in our pickups, feed trucks, and horse trailers. His songs are part of our daily life."

Ian says: "The reason that I write western music is that I live in the country. There is very little difference between working cowboys in Arizona or Alberta. The international border does not matter. Sure there is different horse gear used in different parts of the country but they are all cowboys at heart. This whole cowboy deal is all about the horse. Horses came to the New World from Spain 600 years ago, and cowboys have been riding them ever since. Without the horse, cowboy-ing would be just tractor driving."



PHOTO © LEE RAINE

Ian's music has succeeded because it also is sophisticated. He had to be able to play to a nonwestern audience in Canada and the United States, and entertain them as well. Even though they didn't know what he was singing about, they could feel the spiritual connection with the earth and sky and horse. The music's sadly appealing because it reflects a cowboy culture that is slowly fading away.

Ian still performs throughout North America. When asked how long he plans to continue, he replies: "I tour because I can. A

Hamley & Co.

The famous Hamley & Co. reopened on Sept. 6, 2005, just in time to celebrate its first century of business in Pendleton, Ore. Hamley & Co. has delivered quality craftsmanship and a commitment to working cowboys and buckaroos since 1883.

Originally, Hamley's was a harness and

saddle maker, but the business soon became known as the maker of "the finest saddles man could ride." Famous for its excellent innovations in saddle design, Hamley's developed the "Committee" or "Association" style saddle that became standard equipment for professional saddle-bronc riders throughout the United States and Canada, and the Wade saddle tree, developed for legendary horseman Tom Dorrance and named after Dorrance's friend, Clifford Wade.

The Pearce-Woodfield Development Co., headed by Parley Pearce and Blair Woodfield, spent a great deal of time and money acquiring, restoring and stocking the original building that contained the historic business from 1905 through the late 1990s. Parley Pearce says: "We are in for the long haul to reestablish Hamley's as the premier saddle shop and western store in the world."

Hamley's carries a full line of western

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lot of musicians would like to tour, but they can't fill those concert seats. If the people stop coming to my concerts, I'll hang it up."

The traveling "bedroll cowboy" may be slowly disappearing from the western landscape, but Ian's songs make sure they will not be forgotten. Ian has recently cut a new album. "The title is 'Yellowhead to Yellowstone and Other Love Stories.' Watch for it. Beyond that, I don't have a clue. We will just see what tomorrow brings." ■

Mike Laughlin lives on a ranch in the Ruby Mountains, near Lamoille, Nev. He takes in pasture cattle, day works for ranchers, and writes. He spends winters in Fallon, Nev. Contact mikelaughlin@hotmail.com or www.cowboyshowcase.com. For Ian Tyson's concert dates, visit www.iantyson.com. Tyson portrait © Kurt Markus, www.kurtmarkus.com. Other photos © Lee Raine, www.cowboyshowcase.com.

LETTERS

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11 years living in the Great Basin/eastern Sierra and renews those memories. I use it daily as my notebook for my farming operation to keep track of new calves, making hay, feeding hay and all those other important bits of information. And then, each time I need to collate calving records and the like, I get to look at the pictures again!

RHONDA GILDERSLEEVE, BOSCOBEL, WISCONSIN

You don't know how much we enjoy *RANGE*. I pass mine on. Love to read about old-timers—such hard work they went through.

EDA RENO, WRIGHT, WYOMING

This is Trevor Jones, one month short of his fifth birthday. He rode this sheep at the Oregon State Fair in Salem, Ore., on September 8. He enjoyed it so much, he did not want to get off. He had to be taken off. Trevor and his family live in Beaver Creek, Ore.



MIKE GARDNER, CLACKAMAS, OREGON

NEED MORE DIXONS

I enjoyed Larry Turner's story, "Legend of the MC," about my longtime neighbors, the Dixons, in the Winter 2009 *RANGE*. Clevon worked for us and other ranchers here in Lake City for years. They are really what this country needs more of right now.

Tomorrow is Pearl Harbor Day. My husband of 61 years was on leave from Fort Lewis, Wash., that weekend. A member of the California National Guard, 144 Field Artillery, from Normandy's D-Day to the Rhine River's V.E. Day. He is 90.

I wish there were more of your kind of magazine around this country. Others might learn more about the U.S.A.

JEAN GORZELL, LAKE CITY, CALIFORNIA

Great magazine. Seems as though Minnesota fights lots of the ideas sooner or later, as you do.

PETE NEURURER, WAVERLY, MINNESOTA

Here is my order. You are the only people out there publishing common sense!

TERESA KAUFFMAN, RENO, NEVADA

PERSEVERANCE

We ranch in Kansas and while sometimes it's frustrating to read of the injustice that is dished out to ranches, it's also heartwarming to read the uplifting stories of ranchers and country folks who persevere in spite of adver-

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wear, including boots, hats, tack, and custom-made bits and spurs. On its second level is a gallery featuring some of the best representations of western life by local and national artists. A fully restored third floor is designed to accommodate large parties and conferences in the Cattle Barons' meeting room and the Slick Fork Saloon, overlooking downtown Pendleton. Adjacent to the store is the new Coffee and Wine Shop and a few feet further down the block is the Hamley Steakhouse where you'll find world-class fine dining in an atmosphere filled with Old West nostalgia.

As a registered historical site, Hamley's takes pride in preserving its quality legacy and creating an Old West experience for everyone who walks through its doors. ■

Hamley & Co., 30 SE Court, Pendleton, OR 97801, 541-278-1100, www.hamley.com.



PHOTOS © LEE RAINE



Hamley & Co. in Pendleton, Ore., has a large supply of saddles, boots, western wear, hats and tack.