

# Arts & Entertainment

## Stony Plain head Petersen brings human touch to music biz

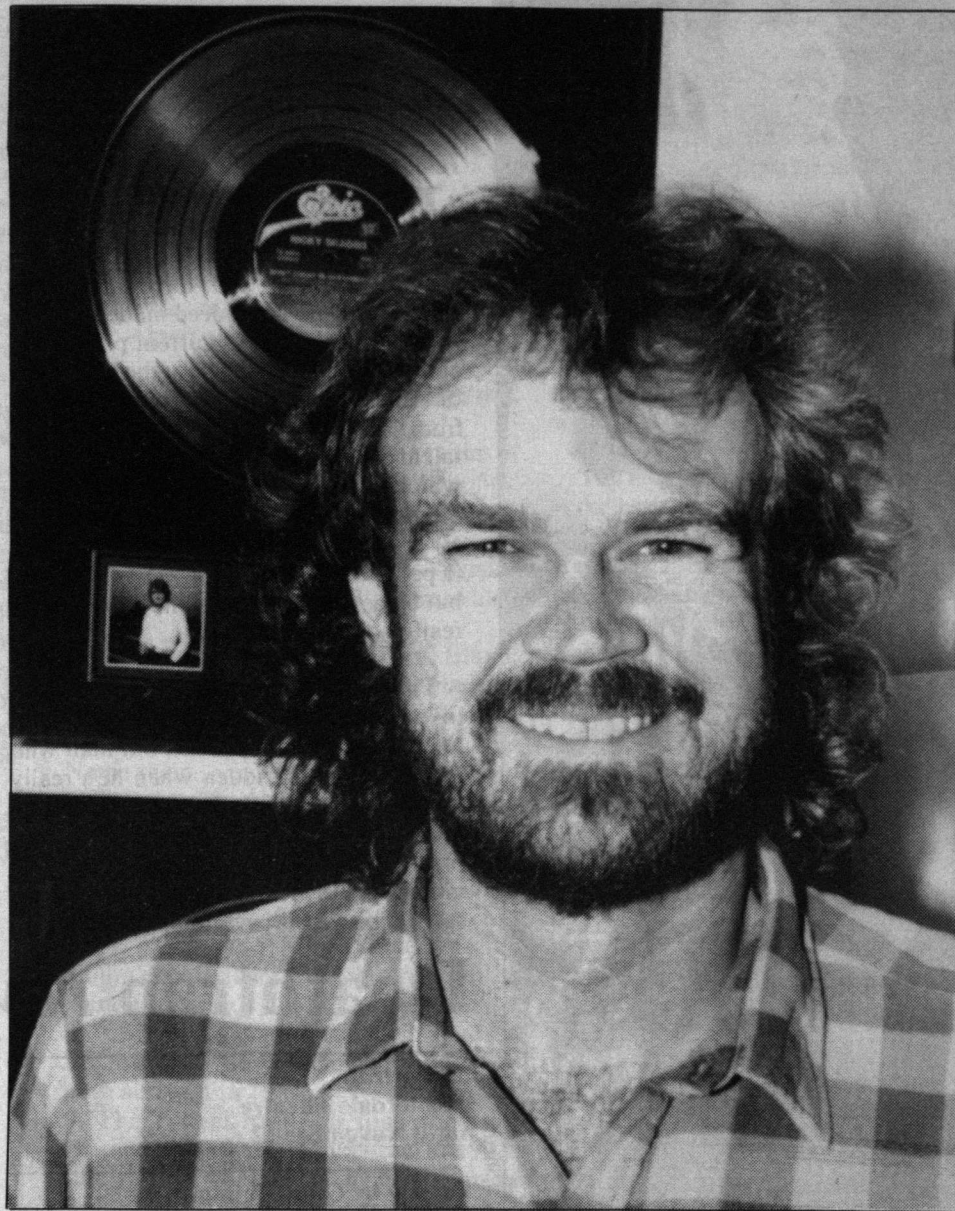
interview by Mike Spindloe

**H**olger Petersen is not a practicing musician, yet he is one of the best-known names on the Alberta, and even national, music scene. Petersen has worn many hats during his career: music journalist, record producer, radio show host, Edmonton Folk Music Festival Artistic Director, and chief executive officer of his own record company, Stony Plain Records. He has also played drums in a band, but these days concentrates on his many other activities.

All of this goes to show that there is plenty of room in the music business for people other than players. The difference between Petersen and some others in the business, however, is that he has always been motivated by his love for music; it is perhaps for this reason that he has gained the respect of both the musicians and business-types in a highly competitive, often cut-throat field.

Petersen's first involvement in the business was as a writer for the *NAIT Nugget*, circa 1971. He recalls that no-one was covering entertainment for the paper and that it was easy to get on "because the editor was just waiting for someone to come along and take up space." The first concert he covered was the Spencer Davis Group at the old Edmonton Gardens. This led to an interview with Roy Orbison and for the next few years, Petersen interviewed "just about everybody who came through town". He also wrote for *The Gateway*, various local underground magazines and was an associate editor of *Poppin*, a now-defunct Vancouver alternative magazine.

After graduating from NAIT, Petersen became more involved with radio, using his stock of already-taped interviews on CKUA. He soon had two shows, both of which are still on the air today: "Natural Blues", which runs 3:30-4:30 pm Saturdays, and "HP Sauce", also on Saturdays from 8-9 pm. He now has another show on CBC, also concentrating on the blues, which runs Canada-wide on Saturday nights. The response, especially to the CBC show, has been "tremendous", according to Petersen. "It makes you realize how important the CBC is to people who



Frank Coughlan

Holger Petersen, all-round musical man about town, did it all because he loves the blues.

live in isolated areas and depend on it for culture. People everywhere connect to the blues — it's honest music that touches your heart."

At CKUA, Petersen "had the opportunity to produce radio shows with local musicians and people who were passing through, like Ry Cooder, Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee and Bruce Cockburn," to name a

few. This led directly to record production, which he "felt was my true calling for a few years. I did anything that would keep me in the studio." These recording sessions were being licensed out to various labels, including London Records, then a major distributor. When Petersen called them up and asked if they would distribute a label if he started one, Stony Plain Records was born.

Paul Hann's *Tumbleweed* was the first Stony Plain release in what is now a substantial catalogue. Petersen attempts to keep as much of the catalogue as possible in print, and claims to be proud of "just about every record I've ever released." The label is now distributed by BMG Music (formerly RCA), and releases all titles on LP and cassette and the majority of new titles on CD. As well, Petersen has Canadian rights to the Rounder CD catalogue and has been releasing their extensive list of titles at a rate of "10 or 12 a month" recently. Petersen feels that CDs are here to stay, and that there won't be much of a battle with DAT: "People are generally satisfied with the quality of that kind of format."

Stony Plain's catalogue is predominantly

in the area of what could broadly be termed "roots" music: blues, folk, country, bluegrass and so on. This saves having to deal with the music industry hype machine, which Petersen "can't afford to do anyway. It takes so much money to have a roll at the dice, to compete; you need a video and the band has to have support to go on the road." He tries to give his artists a realistic idea of what the label can do for them: "The success of any music industry relationship depends on realistic expectations. I let the artist know immediately that airplay prospects aren't great, that singles have to be thought of as promotional tools, and that I will offer their record to every store in the country but I can't promise that they will stock it."

At least two of Stony Plain's artists fly in the face of these conditions. "The Shuffle Demons and Spirit of the West are so great and unique at what they do that they've developed their own audience that supports them." These artists, along with most other Stony Plain acts, can realistically expect to not get much airplay except from college stations, a situation that Petersen is not happy about but doesn't see much

Petersen calls the prospect of any changes to SU Records "ridiculous and disgraceful."

chance of changing, saying "the chances of radio opening up are less and less as the years go by. A few things break through by independent routes, but the competition is so tough and radio stations are so narrow-minded."

Stony Plain has had its share of commercial success, however. Ian Tyson's *Cowboyography* is going gold in Canada, and has won 15 awards so far. Petersen feels that "artistically it's one of the best records ever done in that genre, and for a pure traditional country artist to go gold is extremely rare." Other big sellers for the label have been Ricky Skaggs, Spirit of the West and bluesman Robert Cray.

Besides Stony Plain, a large contributing factor to Petersen's high public profile has been his involvement with the Folk Festival. During his tenure as Artistic Director, the festival has presented a diversity of talent which is the envy of festivals all over North America. Although Petersen is stepping down as Director this year due to other commitments, his involvement has been sheer pleasure. "There is a certain buzz created by bringing in these wonderful people who haven't been here before, creating a submersion of talents for the weekend and giving the musicians the opportunity to inspire each other in an environment they feel comfortable in."

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## Wyman dance theatre worthwhile

Anna Wyman Dance Theatre  
SUB Theatre  
Monday, November 7

review by Jennifer Owano

**R**ecently back from an overseas performance in Brisbane, Australia, the Vancouver-based Anna Wyman Dance Theatre ended a four-week tour of Alberta and Saskatchewan in SUB Theatre Monday and Tuesday. Featuring works by Wyman, the founder and artistic director of the troupe, as well as two other choreographers, the program was fast-paced and versatile. However, by the end of the performance, the dancers were unable to hide their fatigue from the hectic schedule.

The first piece, "Everyday a Sunday" by Tsutomu Ben Iida, was a study of the idiosyncracies of eight personalities caught in a waiting room on a Sunday afternoon. Set to music from Brahms' sonatas for cello and piano, these staidly-dressed dancers revealed no emotion as they roamed the stage like robots. Each mechanical movement — a fall, a leap, a lift — was often repeated obsessively like a scratched record. At times the stage was filled with so many different actions, it was dizzying trying to take it all in.

An appropriate change from the previous piece, Bengt Jorgen's "Universal Rhythm" was alive with energy that had the dancers leaping in the air more times than they were on the ground. This well-rehearsed piece used the patterns of a village dance,

and John McDowell's score swayed the audience with its quick tempo.

According to Greek drama, "Hamartia" is the hero's tragic flaw. In Wyman's tense and dramatic piece of that name, Robert Russell was the hero and Linda Arkelian his conscience, who led him through a series of anguished movements to his downfall. The piece ended with Russell hanging lifelessly from a door frame.

Set to her four favourite operatic arias, Wyman's "Maskerade" showed off her talent in creating stunning visual images, as demonstrated in the first of a series of vignettes. A long band of reddish gauze was stretched out between two men who manoeuvred it in relation to a female dancer. The woman in turn danced towards and away from and under and along the cloth, until finally she wraps herself and her partners in its folds.

The rest of Maskerade was a vision of beautiful costumes, glittering masks, and brightly colored fans, but the dancing was unable to match the glamour. The dancers became awkward and heavy, and by the time the piece ended, there was a feeling that the dancers did not give a hundred percent.

Despite this flaw, the overall program was enjoyable to watch and very entertaining. The Anna Wyman Dance Theatre is sure to visit Edmonton again, and if you didn't catch them this time around, it would be worthwhile to watch them the next time.



Anna Wyman Dance Theatre, back from their globe-trotting, played the SUB Theatre Monday and Tuesday night.