

by Elaine Lefebvre

When it comes to entertainment in general and performance in particular, Tommy Banks can be outspoken and critical. He has some definite opinions on a variety of subjects, some of which are below.

Viewpoint: Canadian Talent

"People outside the business very often ask the question, 'Why isn't there more Canadian talent seen?' and 'Why don't you use more Canadian talent?'"

"We use all the good Canadian talent we can find. Good Canadian talent just doesn't mean that you write nice songs, that you play good, or that you sing alright. Because that's terrific in a recording studio but this is a television program."

In this respect he felt that many television programs go hand in hand with performance, and that successful performance involves more than talent. In his opinion, Canadian performers for the most part, have not yet realized this.

"If you went and watched them in a theatre, on a television show on in a nightclub, you'd be bored to death in about 35

seconds. They don't know how to talk, how to act, how to give any meaning to anything they are saying; they don't know how to look, how to walk, and they can't look anyone in the eye. I could give you a long list of alleged Canadian performers that we've had on this program and who I've seen on other programs who don't deserve the name performers. They might be guitar players, singers, and writer, but they are not performers."



He also felt that often Canadian rock bands; for example, show a lack of consideration and respect for the audience, and consequently lose out to American bands who do know how to perform in order to gain audience appreciation.

"The audiences don't have to be trained. That is a cop-out that people who haven't done their homework use. The worst line in the world from a performer is that the audience stunk."

With respect to Canadian talent leaving the country, Tommy Banks feels that this will

Artists and Performers

Tommy Banks cited the difference between the artists and the practitioners of a trade,

pointing out that artists are the people who will make the giant contributions in music and practitioners will not. Unlike performers, he felt artists could be legitimately excused from having audience concern, but did stress a point in relation to the artistic decision.

"If people decide to take this route they must not complain about the fact that they did not make 4 million dollars last year and that the audience didn't give them a standing ovation."

He emphasized that a person has to consciously decide whether he is going to be a



highly-principled artist or he is going to entertain people. "I consciously decided that I was going to entertain the folks."

Development of Edmonton as a Center for Music and The Tommy Banks Show

"Edmonton is and has been for a very long time a very good center for music. It isn't right to say that any particular thing is doing it. If the incidence of opportunity begins to happen, and if the facilities are available to do things, pretty soon it will be good."

People on his TV show have had nothing but compliments about Edmonton, and the ITV crew.

"They're delighted. Frankly, this show has been doing better in a lot of respects than most other TV shows of this kind that are done anywhere."

Banks feels a lot of credit is due to behind-the-scenes workers. This job includes the picking of his guests, which is done by a committee consisting of the producer, the director, and Tommy Banks and his wife.



(She runs a theatrical agency.) "My wife books the talent on the show. We sit down and figure out who we'd like to have on. It's not as simply as to say we'd like to have so-and-so on. It depends on money and availability." Banks and the general researcher for the show design questions to ask the guests.

"It's amazing how many people see our show on the air - it's been on the air on CBC for years - and don't understand it comes from Edmonton. Only

working in Nevada and found out that while it was very nice and we were making more money than we thought we'd ever see, on the road it dissipates very quickly. Also, I have worked in a lot of places and this is a very good place to live. I just happened to be lucky enough to come along at the time when a lot of things were about to happen in Edmonton and this part of the country generally."

With regards to Talk-Variety shows in particular, he

non-musical areas.

Doing his show from Edmonton poses some difficulties, and he feels that what is been done here cannot be considered successful as yet. "This isn't exactly the show business center of the world. The talent pool - while it's disproportionately high for the size of the city - obviously isn't as big here as in Toronto, or even Vancouver. It's harder to get to Edmonton. We had a terrible time with airline flights. It's

TOMMY BANKS

three shows were done in Hamilton because the ITV studios were not ready yet."

His special reason for leaving CBC was so he could do the show five days a week for an hour, instead of once a week for half an hour.

Why has he decided to stay in Edmonton when he has had opportunities to go elsewhere - like to the States, or down East? "I did go to the States for a while. We had a lounge act that we took to the U.S. We were

likes the music as well as the talking. "I suppose I like the talk-variety show more than any other kind of TV - and I've done other kinds. But I do like all kinds of TV. I like straight variety-music shows, too; when you do a straight variety show or straight music show you can pay more attention to the music and that's an advantage musically. He admits, though, that on the talk-variety show you have the opportunity to meet more interesting people from

getting better, but for the last few years its been really hard to physically get people here."

About His Future

Banks says he will stay with TV. "But this is the most insecure business in the world. You exist on the whim of things over which you have utterly no control, and this business doesn't have any pension plans. What is required is work and belief in yourself."



Western Canada's only TV crane helps produce the Tommy Banks Show