

# You can call me Larry...



Gowan - the man, the myth, the legend

Photo by Judson DeLong

by Peter J. Cullen  
Brunswickan Entertainment

You can call him Larry. Yes, you can even still call him Gowan. Better yet, why not call him the best act to frequent Fredericton so far this year? Shrugging off the image of an aging Eighties rock star, Lawrence Gowan makes his return to mainstream with a strong new album, his own record label, and a love for live performance.

The Dock witnessed its largest crowd in ages for one of Canada's most heralded musicians last Thursday. In response, Gowan proceeded to demonstrate that his current songs, accompanied by his high charting hits over the past 10 years, are the rungs with which he has built his ladder to success. Immensely popular in the mid- to late-1980s with hits such as 'You're A Strange Animal', 'Criminal Mind', and 'Moonlight Desires', Gowan seemed to disappear from the radio waves for a period of time. However, the 1993 album *...But You Can Call Me Larry*, thrust the thirty-something singer/songwriter back into the public eye — and ear — with an exclamation point.

Accompanying the musical changes, Gowan also began incorporating his first name as the epithet on the last album; however, advertisements continue to promote him simply as 'Gowan'. "I think that forever in people's minds I'll always be 'Gowan,'" he said with a smile. "But that's alright. It was just a way of making a distinction on the last record between what I'm doing in this decade as opposed to the last one."

And that difference can be heard on Gowan's latest addition to his discography, *The Good Catches Up*. Gone are the electronic, synthesized pop sounds of the Eighties, but his incandescent voice and portentous piano still dominate the nine new songs. One of the largest changes for Gowan has been the creation of his own label, dubbed 'Gowan Productions'. The CBS/Sony logo donned his first five albums, but for *The Good Catches Up*, he decided to enter the realm of independent music. "I was enticed by the independent scene of music, and I wanted to try it ... What I like is the fact that I was able to make a record without having to appease anyone in a record company whatsoever. We finished it, we were happy with it, and we were able to put it out exactly as it was and not have to fight our way through,"

Gowan stated. While withdrawing from a major record label may seem risky, he explained that the indie scene provided more independence while enforcing less tension and no control from others. "I've always exercised artistic freedom. That's not the absolute reason why I chose to do it this way ... I guess I'm past the stage of feeling inclined to justify myself to people in a big record company before I put a record out."

Although Gowan now holds the stature to strike out on his own, he has achieved an incredible amount since his humble beginnings. After the "unnoteworthy demise" of his debut album, Gowan's breakthrough in Canada arrived with his second record, *Strange Animal*. Recorded with Peter Gabriel's band at John Lennon's home in England, *Strange Animal* spawned 'Criminal Mind', a song that is synonymous with Gowan. "I can never go on stage and play 'Criminal Mind' and not have an absolute avalanche of memories that are so strong ... People ask me how I get it up to perform that song night after night. It's impossible for me to play it without a lot of emotion. It's the song that brought me to prominence, that brought me to the public mind to begin with," he said. "It's a song that I recorded at John Lennon's home ... on the same piano that John recorded *Imagine* on, and the same equipment, the same gear and everything ... I meet people all the time who constantly refer to that song as being of major importance in their lives. That is a great thing to have had."

While Gowan still receives compliments and appreciation for his work, many have recently joked, 'Oh, how the mighty have fallen,' with Gowan's appearance at the diminutive Dock. But he explained that the location he plays is not of utmost importance to him. "Playing live is where I began in music, it's what I enjoy doing the most in music, and the venue is really of little consequence," he said. "Live music, no matter where it's made, is still the greatest way to enjoy a band. It changes the whole experience, and it actually connects you with that act either closer or further away than you'll ever be."

But no one appeared to be driven away after Gowan began playing last Thursday. Sitting alone on stage, fingers draped over his keyboard, Gowan enticed the crowd with a jaunty piano collage. Festive clapping and cheers of encouragement were emitted from the audience, as

Gowan continued solo in order to prepare the crowd for the feature presentation. The band, consisting of Red Rider's Ken Greer (lead guitar) and Jeff Jones (bass), as well as drummer Paul DeLong, soon emerged and proceeded to establish their position in the tiny area provided. The quartet delved into the wonderful 'All the Lovers in the World' and then the latest album's title track. Ears perked up at the sound of 'Moonlight Desires', one of Gowan's largest hits. The song ended with Gowan's flitting hand gestures towards the ceiling, and the applause continued long after the tune ended. Heading into the quicker, heavier songs, the rainbow spectrum of lights attacked the simple white backdrop in a frenzy of colour. Gowan strode out from behind his keyboard, adorned in tight purple pants and cowboy boots, and proceeded to trot around his spinning keyboard in rain dance fashion. The powwow on the floor assembled around their chief while he demonstrated that his songs have not lost their popularity over the years. In fact, after a brief verse of The Doors' 'People Are Strange', the crowd began whooping wildly as Gowan leaped into 'You're A Strange Animal'. His prowess on the keyboard became truly evident with this number, proving that the piano, and himself for that matter, can still propel a song through power and passion.

The encore produced 'Criminal Mind', unleashing Gowan in all his glory. After the crashing crescendo ending, Jones and DeLong departed for the evening, allowing Gowan and Greer to enact a cover of Neil Young's 'Heart of Gold' that left the original version paling in comparison. The show finally ended as it began, with only Gowan left — sitting at his keyboard — to close out the evening by singing the new album's final track, 'You'll Be With Me'.

Instead of immediately filing out into the night once the show ceased, the patrons remained behind to collect Gowan's autograph. People paid five dollars for a single photo so they could proudly carry home the signature of a star. Perhaps Gowan's popularity is not passé. Obviously his talent has not dissipated. In fact, with his recent SOCAN awards for the charting success of his songs, it is apparent he has only become better with age. But Gowan's most important attribute lies in his ability to host a great evening, and he seems to be loving it all the while. More importantly, the fans are loving it, too.

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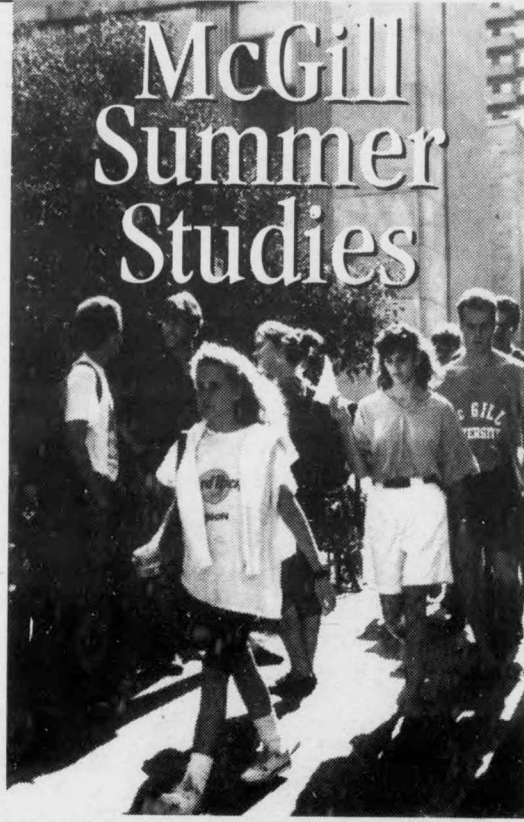
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