

Tragically Hip, "A National Celebration," Universal/Eagle Rock

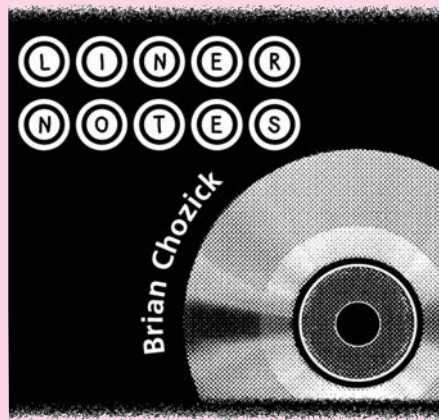
On Oct. 17 a musical genius left this earth. He wasn't a household name like Prince, Tom Petty or David Bowie, but to the citizens of Canada and the cult of enlightened ones in the United States he was a king. Gordon Downie was the lead singer/songwriter of the Tragically Hip. In the summer of 2016 he was diagnosed with terminal brain cancer, so they decided to make one last trek around Canada, with a 15-city tour and a grand farewell in their hometown of Kingston, Ontario. "A National Celebration" is the new DVD that presents that show in all its glory. As Gord walks out in his metallic silver leather suit, custom sock scarf to match his feet, completed by a peacock-feathered hat, it's clear this isn't going to be an ordinary Hip show. The band covers 30 songs representing their three-decade-plus career. Each song is filled with more passion than the one before with the entire band in top form, including three encores and concluding with "Ahead by a Century." Preceding this video was the release of the incredible documentary "A Long Time Running," which chronicles the time and struggles leading up to the momentous occasion. The Tragically Hip will be forever missed and no sentiment rings truer than the one on the shirt of long time technical director Billy Ray: "In Gord We Trust."

The Pistoleros, "Silver," Fervor

In the nearly two decades writing for the El Paso Scene, I have made two things painfully obvious. The first being the Rolling Stones or their related side projects will always get a favorable nod in my book. Secondly I have a huge fondness for the Arizona desert rock sound. Whether it's the Gin Blossoms having another go at it, or the Sand Rubies making any kind of blip on my radar, or one-time Refreshments' Roger Clyne being phenomenal with his Peacemakers, I have documented it here. One band in that lot, however, has slipped through the cracks: The Pistoleros. That's most likely because their output has been light, to put it mildly. Let's just say you can count the albums with the actual Pistoleros moniker on one hand. They are currently celebrating their 20th anniversary and with that comes their latest release "Silver." The sound is familiar with guitar-driven rock, heavy doses of anthemic radio-friendly hooks, with some honky-tonk grime to keep things a little dusty. Their last one was in 2015 and if they can keep up this kind of brilliance, then they will absolutely be my new keepers of the Arizona desert rock torch.

The Stereophonics, "Scream Above the Clouds," Warner Bros.

The good news comes threefold with the latest by the Stereophonics, "Scream Above the Sounds." The first being that the band made it all the way to the No. 2 position on the charts (in the U.K. of course, because America still has trouble realizing this band's greatness). The next is that release has major USA distribution with Warner Brothers Records, so there's no need to go on a treasure hunt to find it. Most importantly, the band sounds better than ever and have crafted one of their best discs to date. It might be a little slicker in spots than past efforts, but it's still well over three-quarters a tank full of guitar-heavy rock with some added glam highlights. Horns, keyboards, and a gospel choir have a greater presence than we have heard, taking us to a new level of magnificence — which is quite a career accomplishment being two decades and 10 albums in. Of course there is a deluxe edition boasting five bonus tracks that are well worth the price of admission, with acoustic, live and session cuts. By all means "Scream Above



the Sounds" if you happen to know anyone who has not yet hooked themselves up to the Stereophonics band wagon.

Collective Soul, "Collective Soul: Live," Suretone

It probably won't be the next "Frampton Come Alive," (the 1976 classic by Peter Frampton that has sold close to 11 million copies), but there is no reason it shouldn't. People aren't really buying physical albums anymore, much less live releases, but maybe it's time to rediscover why live recordings are so fantastic. A great place to start is from a band that has been together for a quarter-century. Collective Soul have nine proper releases under their belt, with only one other concert documented (that was with Atlanta Symphony Youth Orchestra so that really doesn't count). This one was recorded from 2015 to 2017, allowing the band to pick the very best performances of each cut, and the outcome was an exceptional rocket-fueled show. There are 17 tracks, opening up appropriately with a much appreciated heavy version of "Heavy." They move through their catalogue of work, even throwing us off the scent with a delicate piano opening to their massive chart topper "Shine" that quickly changes into their most beloved hit. Plenty of extended guitar solos take a few cuts into superb new territory. Some new material also makes a welcome appearance into the set list. Things close with the debut of their newest song "Right as Rain," just to keep us anxiously awaiting a new studio disc.

Collectibles: The Killers, "Don't Waste Your Wishes," Island

The holiday season may be over, so it easily can be said that this release isn't really striking while the iron's hot. It simply doesn't matter, because this is The Killers. "Don't Waste Your Wishes" came out as a ridiculously small-pressed limited edition on CD in 2016, but is seeing a slightly larger production on vinyl this month. The band has delivered primarily original Christmas cuts as singles for the past decade, with the sale of each one benefiting Product Red, a charity helping to eliminate HIV/AIDS in eight African countries. The only problem is that these singles are increasingly difficult to find, especially after their original release year. "Don't Waste Your Wishes" compiles all those holiday-themed ditties in one place. It includes their duets with the Dawes, Toni Halliday of Curve, and Elton John to name a few. Eight of the record's ten songs were penned by the band themselves and nobody paints Christmas scene like the Killers. "Don't Waste Your Wishes" trying to obtain this set next year — be sure to buy it now.

Keep an eye out for these releases:

- David Byrne — "American Utopia"
- Fleeting Ends — "I Know You Lie Cos So Do I"
- Kid Dakota — "Denervation"
- The Cabin Fever — "Exercise the Demon"

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This year started out rough. On Jan. 3, my daughter-in-law's nephew died at age 13. Although Peter suffered from a genetic neuromuscular disease that was likely to kill him in his teens, his death came suddenly from respiratory failure as he was riding to school.

The next day, my pastor's wife died at age 44. Jill had been diagnosed with Stage 4 breast cancer less than two years earlier. Her death came the same day that she and her husband had told their doctors they would not seek further treatment after tests showed the cancer had spread everywhere. She left behind three children.

These are mind-numbing tragedies that force one to confront the utter senselessness of such suffering and death.

One of the biggest arguments people make against God is the existence of evil. Another way of putting this is, why is the world crooked instead of straight?

The renowned Christian writer C. S. Lewis started out as an atheist, and the problem of evil was a big reason he rejected God for so long. But there was something about that argument that haunted him and eventually led him to faith. Here's what he wrote in his book, "Mere Christianity":

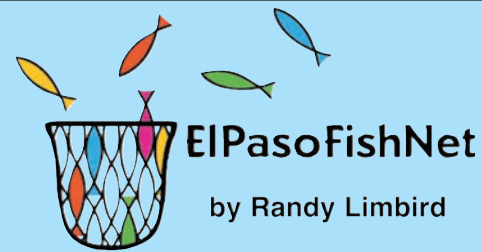
"My argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how had I got this idea of just and unjust? A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line."

Lewis himself was devastated by grief when his wife died of cancer. Even the great C.S. Lewis (who had earlier written a book called "The Problem of Pain" dealing with the issues of suffering and evil) was overwhelmed by his loss.

He later wrote, "We were promised sufferings. They were part of the program. We were even told, 'Blessed are they that mourn?' and I accept it. I've got nothing that I hadn't bargained for. Of course it is different when the thing happens to oneself, not to others, and in reality, not imagination."

As Lewis realized, all the theology, all the right answers do not provide much comfort in the face of such grief. Explanations are not consolations.

But we cannot help but wonder why such things happen. We keep asking why. We cannot accept that God is unconcerned about our suffering. But if we let go of God, we also lose any sense



of why we would expect anything different. It is our anger and our anguish that affirm that the world is not supposed to be the way it is, that there are such things as justice and love.

If evil is not a problem for us, then there is no hope. The moment we accept that pain and suffering and sin are just the way the world works and it's just a matter of luck if we can escape it, then we have accepted crooked lines as the way life is supposed to be.

In Luke Chapter 3:5 (referring to Isaiah 40:3), it says "the crooked paths shall become straight." How can anything as crooked as the death of a child or the death of a mother be made straight?

My wife and I had scheduled a trip to the East Coast that happened to coincide with Peter's memorial services.

Although Peter had been disabled his whole life, his family — including his twin sister and two older brothers — had never spared any expense or trouble to provide him as normal and as happy a life as any child could hope for. They took him on vacations where he skied and scuba-dived. He played on a wheelchair hockey team. The disease contorted his body, but he was full of life and love, and never felt sorry for himself.

At the visitation in a Philadelphia area church, hundreds of classmates, their parents, family friends (well, practically everyone whoever met Peter, it seemed like) waited in the frigid cold to pay their respects as the line of visitors wound its way through the church and extended about a block outside. I sat watching for hours as the family graciously greeted every visitor. While the people had come to give condolences, it seemed like they instead were receiving a blessing from the family as they passed through. People knew they were in the presence of a kind of love that prevails against any kind of evil.

That's when it hit me: "The crooked paths shall become straight."

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