

Pop's top picks await release

MUSIC | *Oh What A Feeling*, a 77-song aural compendium of Canadian rock, debuts next week with a triple purpose. And oh, what a job it was.

BY ELIZABETH RENZETTI
Arts Reporter
Toronto

IF you could put only one Gordon Lightfoot song on a compilation of Canadian music, which one would you pick? Which two acts are important enough to merit two tracks each? Which band provided the title track, *Oh What a Feeling*, to this "vital collection of Canadian music"? (Answers will be revealed only when this entire article is read.)

All right, so the questions don't rank up there with "should Lucien Bouchard continue to receive his MP pension even if he heads a separate Quebec?" but they were among the many small dilemmas facing the four-person committee that put together the four-disc boxed set of Canadian pop history. *Oh What A Feeling*, which will sell for less than \$30 and will be in stores next week, has the triple purpose of creating an aural history of Canadian pop, commemorating the 25th anniversary of the Juno Awards, and raising money for charity.

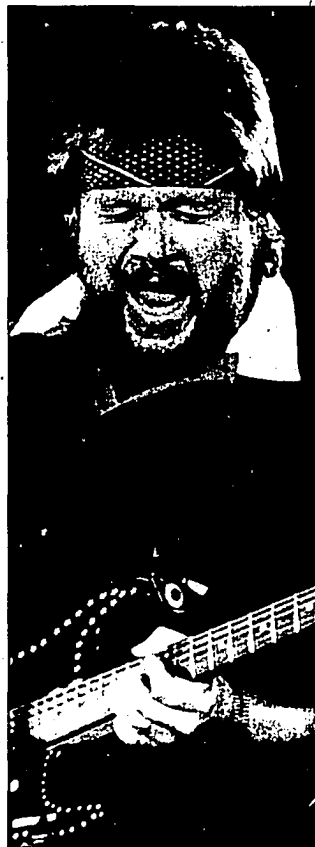
The four people charged with the task of sorting gems from paste were Larry LeBlanc, music journalist, radio host and owner of "an indecent number" of records (more than 40,000, in fact); MCA Records vice-president Randy Lennox, whose brainchild this was; Lee Silversides, presi-

dent of Juno organizing body Canadian Recording Artists Association; and Virgin Records' vice-president Laura Bartlett.

The 77-track set spans 1963 (Ian and Sylvia's *Four Strong Winds*) to 1995 (Alanis Morissette's *You Oughta Know*, for which she has a Grammy nomination). Chief organizer and wheedler LeBlanc resisted the idea of placing the songs in chronological order, deciding instead to arrange the songs "sonically and sometimes historically." That means somebody's going to get a shock on disc one, when Bachman-Turner Overdrive's *Takin' Care of Business* segues into Rough Trade's *High School Confidential*.

Each of the discs does have a certain flavour, or as Randy Lennox puts it, "somebody who's in his 40s might be all over disc three but not like disc two." That's because disc three mellows out with Anne Murray and Leonard Cohen, while disc two shakes its tail with Mo'Nique and Maestro Fresh Wes. Some of the tracks will be hauntingly familiar, since many of the earlier ones were radio staples used to meet Canadian-content regulations.

Even though *Oh What A Feeling* is a charity record (benefiting the children's Starlight Foundation, Safehaven and the CARAS scholarship fund), getting artists to waive rights to their songs required some finesse.



Randy Bachman (of Bachman-Turner Overdrive), some members of The Pursuit of Happiness (from left, Brad Parker, Moe Berg and Rachel Oldfield), and Gordon Lightfoot are among the 75 artists featured on *Oh What A Feeling*.

One artist was unhappy with the Junos; others wanted the proceeds to go to their favourite charities. In some cases, the copyrights were in strange places: LeBlanc had to finagle *Four Strong Winds* from Lawrence Welk Co., which had bought the Vanguard label the song was recorded on. In others, bruised egos

were the barrier: LeBlanc managed to get the rights to The Band's 1968 classic *The Weight* by making peace with the warring camps in the once-great band.

The strangest case may have been *Tears Are Not Enough*, the all-star singalong recorded for famine relief in 1985. As a benefit single, it would seem natural for inclusion on a benefit record — except nobody could find out who owned the rights because the song, written by Bryan Adams, Jim Vallance and David Foster, belongs to a now-defunct charity. After some fancy footwork, LeBlanc secured the rights and it now closes the album.

There were three songs LeBlanc regrets not getting: Snow's *Informer* (legal technicalities plagued the ex-con-turned-rapper's hit), Paul Anka's *You're Having My Baby* (he would waive rights for only a year) and, especially, anything by **Joni Mitchell**.

"If I'd had a couple of more days I would have got *Joni*," said LeBlanc, who was talking his way through the wall of personnel surrounding the singer-songwriter. Unfortunately, he didn't have time to get to her, as the disc had to be sent to the manufacturers, which were donating their services.

When all of pop music has to be compressed into five hours, time was at a premium, which meant that longer tracks like Jane Siberry's *Mimi on the Beach* and Klaatu's *Call-*

ing Occupants of Interplanetary Craft didn't make the cut. Neither could LeBlanc justify including his personal favourite, the catchy but historically slight Kings tune *Switching to Glide* (which includes the immortal couplet, "Nothing matters but the weekend, from a Tuesday point of view.")

There are the immortals, and then there are the bands which, if still around, are the big Saturday night draw in cottage country. The eighties were more a tin than a golden age for Canadian music, or as Lennox puts it, "to say music was a touch corporate in the eighties might be an understatement."

Still, an entire decade can't be ignored — and it wasn't all bad, anyway. Along with contributions from Honeymoon Suite (*New Girl Now*) and Loverboy (*Turn Me Loose*), there are songs that may just last forever, like the brat-rock anthem *I'm An Adult Now*, by The Pursuit of Happiness. That latter song symbolized LeBlanc's lofty goal — that these discs would be historical documents, not just fodder for a living room DJ. "There's a hundred records that sold better than that, but that's one's seminal," because it pre-dated, and perhaps kick-started, the independent-record boom in Canada. Pursuit of Happiness produced 10,000 copies of the song on their own, before they had a record deal, LeBlanc says, which broke ground for other top-

selling indie bands like Lowest of the Low and Barenaked Ladies.

A record of only chart-toppers would have been dull indeed, so the committee tried to pick tracks that somehow symbolized the artist: LeBlanc points out that the Tragically Hip song *New Orleans is Sinking* may not be the band's most successful, but it gets audiences up and screaming every time. Neil Young's management was asked to donate *Heart of Gold*, but they returned with a more appropriate suggestion: *Helpless*, with its famous opening lines, "There is a town in North Ontario . . ."

Although LeBlanc says he wasn't sidetracked by music-industry politics, he was lobbied heavily by some managers to include their artists. Still, "it's the first time the industry has come together outside of *Tears are Not Enough*, which was artist-driven," said LeBlanc, who was alarmed to find the project taking three weeks to put together instead of the planned three days. "And it may be the last time, because it was so difficult."

(Answers: If *You Could Read My Mind* is the Gordon Lightfoot song chosen, over *The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald* and *Sundown*. Only Anne Murray (*Snowbird*, *You Needed Me*) and The Guess Who (*These Eyes*, *American Woman*) were worthy of two songs each. Crowbar, pride of Ancaster, Ont., provided the title track.)