



# THE NAME IS NED



Flanders Fields 1963.

## THE NAME IS NED

He was a familiar sight strolling down Queen Street West, Toronto, and particularly the stretch between University Avenue and Bathurst Street. Handsome Ned had his straw Stetson affixed to his head, cowboy boots clicking time, bandanna around his neck and bolo ties jangling in step. He had an easy smile dominated by a set of big crooked teeth biting down the lower lip as if to hold in his joy. You could have asked nearly anyone on Queen Street about Ned and his presence, and probably have got an opinion. For seven years, from late 1979 to January 1987, Ned built a loyal fan base and word of him, and his influence, spread in Canada. And it seemed to emanate from the

back room of a bar on Queen Street that was filled to capacity every Saturday.

The tale of Handsome Ned, AKA Robin David Masyk, is in some ways the story of a life unfulfilled. Few doubted his promise - his voice, songs and unique character - and he seemed destined for fame and critical acclaim. But he died at 29 years of age, without ever getting a record deal and releasing only two independent 45-RPM singles. I hope that this collection of songs, photos, drawings and words will please the fans and friends of Ned, as well as serve as a compelling introduction for those who never knew Handsome Ned and his country music world.

We were like gypsies travelling from base to base after Dad joined the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) in Vancouver, British Columbia when I was two years old. On my 5th birthday, June 4th, 1957, my little brother was born in Zweibrucken, West Germany. He was presented as my birthday present by the folks and I was pleased that I could name him. My first choice was to name him Batman, however this couldn't be granted. So I named him "Robin" - a small, colorful but harmless, bird's name, and subservient sidekick Robin to the macho Batman that I





saw myself as anyway. But he almost didn't make it home - Robin was born two months premature, a tiny three pounds and spent the first two months of his life in an incubator. When the Folks finally brought him home he was tiny, red, shriveled, now five pounds, with asthma, and looked unlikely to succeed.

Through two tours of duty in Europe - France and Germany - we were usually without television and so we made our own fun. Robin bugged me, and I listened to a lot of music. Sometimes we roughhoused and once in France I pushed him off a bed onto his face when he was 6, which is why his teeth grew in crooked. Music was always a big part of life when we were growing up. I bought rock n' roll records at the base PX and tuned into the US and Canadian military base radio stations, as well as the pirate stations like Radio Caroline broadcasting from ships in the English Channel. Occasionally on a Saturday afternoon we heard live country and western music at the Corporal's Club in Germany when we went there with the Folks. Even when we drove about Europe in the mid-60's in our little, black Opel we were singing songs from With The Beatles as well as tunes like Dang Me, Do-Wacka-do and 99 Bottles of Beer. Robin showed a natural talent for singing - it was

ingrained. Dad was a good whistler, but there were no musicians on his side of the family. But there were plenty in our mother's family. Working under the stage name, Bee Newman, Mom was once a torch singer in the manner of Connie Francis. She played in a number of small combos and big bands, often with her older brothers, Romaine Newman, a multi-instrumentalist, and the late Babe Newman, one of the best jazz trumpeters in Canada. She has a 78-RPM record that she recorded independently on which she sings "Sunday Kind of Love" and "No Moon At All" to the accompaniment of a piano. She sounds youthful, lovely and tone perfect.

Robin started listening to 60's and 70's rock from my collection, and then he discovered the plaintive music of country rock pioneer, Gram Parsons, starting with his work with the Byrds on "Sweetheart of the Rodeo". Parsons led Robin to other country music such as the Austin, Texas-based Outlaws music from the early to mid-70's and then further back to the 50's and 60's country. Robin once explained his musical influences in an interview: "I got an extensive musical education from what was being played at home. My father was into country and I'm a music lover myself. But of course when

you're a kid you dislike country because it's something you hear around the house. You rebel and move on to other music. Whereas, my mother was a big Elvis fan. Roger Miller was playing all the time, as were the Beatles. My brother, being five years older than I, brought in the records when I was younger and wasn't buying them yet. Back about 1970, my brother was into the Velvet Underground, Captain Beefheart, and people like that. I got the early education from his tastes, then I started getting into other sounds and eventually came back around to country."

Dad retired from the Air Force when Robin was 12, and we moved to the town of Stoney Creek, Ontario, west of Toronto. Then, after seeing me off hitchhiking with my long hair and my thumb in the air in summers of 1969 and 1970, at the age of 15, Robin hitchhiked west himself in summer of 1972. Only he wasn't coming back when the school bell rang in September. After Grade 10, Robin preferred to educate himself from his experiences of life on the road and from prose and poetry, especially the beat writings out of City Lights by Kerouac, Ginsberg, Ferlingetti, Burroughs, O'Hara and Bukowski. His bookshelf also held comics and books on cartooning, NY School and European art books, European writers like

Artaud and Lorca, country music books and The World According to Beaver.

Robin traveled south and west, eventually to Mexico, by way of which he arrived one day, 16 years old, to Banff, Alberta. Staying on in Banff, he worked at the Banff Springs Hotel and the King Edward Hotel and for two years he sewed his seeds and did some more growing up. In early 1976, Robin moved to Toronto for the first time to attend art school and soon after we moved into an apartment on the 3rd floor, above Spadina Avenue.



With our black Opel 1965.

There we had three large windows in which he glued big, black, plastic letters, souvenirs from Robin's favorite restaurant in Banff, forming three words which proclaimed to the street "EAT AT NED'S".



Produced by Jim Masyk  
Engineered and mastered by Peter J. Moore, The E Room, Toronto, May 2000.

Art direction by Melissa Hazel and Jim Masyk, Graphic design by Mystique Creative, Cover photograph by Nick Masyk. Rear cover photograph by Peter MacCallum. The Four Neds, as well as photographs on pages 7, 20 and 22, by Ross Taylor. Other photographs by Nick Masyk (page 1), Chris Buck (page 10), Bob Mikolajczyk (page 11), and David Lee (page 16). All drawings are by Handsome Ned Masyk.

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Special thanks to all of the musicians who gave to this record, and to Shan Kelley, Melissa Hazel, Steve Koch, Max Wagner, Jeremy Duggan, Trish Cullen, Peter Moore, Paul & Ann Marie Ferraro, Doug Sharpe, Ross Taylor, and Bee & Nick Masyk. Also, thanks to Echo Dave Richards, Blue Rodeo, Doug Chappell, Reva Pomer, Sam Ferrara, Noel Baker, Jon Michaelson, John Borra, Murray McLauchlan, Erella Ganon, Greg Stephens, the Horseshoe Tavern, the Cameron House and many other contributors.

Dedicated to Bee and Nick Masyk

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We boarded my burgundy Ford Galaxy 500 with three friends for a road trip in July 1976 from Toronto to Gonzales, Texas for Willie Nelson's annual July 4th Picnic. We drove straight for 28 hours with a brief pit stop in Austin. Joining Willie were musical friends like Rusty Weir, Kris Kristofferson and Waylon Jennings. We enjoyed their music with thousands of Texans from all over the state, meeting many of them and digging the celebrity of being Canadians in southern Texas liking Texas songs. In the early morning of July 5th, rain came down hard as the picnic was dying down. The stage was dismantled while around it grew a sea of mud, collapsed canopies, crushed Lone Star cans, broken styrofoam coolers and discarded clothing. People flopped about in the mud as they tried to make their way home. I saw Robin in the sun's early light, standing alone in this mud and rubble, singing very loudly and clearly. It was the first time I heard Robin really sing with power. They were probably Jerry Jeff Walker or Guy Clark songs, and probably about trains, Mama, a bottle of wine, or a woman. He couldn't speak for two days with strep throat, but he put on quite a show.

While the rest of us headed back north in the Ford, Robin lingered in Texas for awhile

with our fellow traveler, and his sidekick, Jacques-O. But at the end of that summer, Robin returned to Toronto and began studies at the New School of Art. He painted and sketched and showed talent, honed by his years of cartooning. More often, he hung out at the Brunswick House and Wheat Sheaf Tavern and soon became friends with an older generation of artists like Robert Markle and Gord Rainer, who were also the New School's art professors.

We were following musical dreams when we moved to Austin, Texas in early 1978, Robin bringing along his sweet new 17-year-old girlfriend, Karen, much to the chagrin of her parents back in Hamilton, Ontario. We experienced Austin as a melting pot for music as we frequented the Armadillo World Headquarters to see some of the international acts, and went to historical spots like the Broken Spoke and the Split Rail to hear Texans like Alvin Crow, Delbert McClinton and Butch Hancock. Elsewhere in Austin, we saw acts ranging from Albert King, to Elvis Costello, sitting at his table after he jammed on some old R&B songs with a local punk band, the Skunks, to Sterling Morrison, ex-Velvet Underground guitarist, who had moved to Austin to teach at UT. Robin would return to Austin a few years later as

"Ned" to play some gigs and when asked his claim-to-fame by the Toronto Star he said: "Playing at the Broken Spoke, the legendary Texas honky tonk where Hank Williams, Ernest Tubb, and Bob Wills used to play."

It was a hot spring in Austin and we sat on Robin and Karen's balcony drinking Pearl and Lone Star beers and talked about music and forming a band. I had been playing guitar with country rockabilly singer/songwriter, Dennis J. Olson, in places like the Bag of Chicken on 6th Street in Austin, and had written a song called "Sun Rockin'". Robin was starting to play guitar and sing when he was on his own, but mostly he loved to hold court with friends and meet new people. Robin, Karen and I eventually returned to Toronto and in 1979 we got an apartment together on Queen Street West, west of Bathurst. In 1985, Ned told a newspaper that he now considered Toronto home "because I've lived here longer than anywhere else." We finally started a band, "The Velours", with a drummer, Mike Blinky (I've forgotten his real last name, but he was a good guy who blinked a lot as if struggling to stay awake at the drums). Mike brought in his friend, Larry Larmand, to play bass and the Velours played our first gig in the fall of 1979. We were, by

a couple of months, the first rockabilly band in what soon became a thriving rockabilly scene in Toronto.

Robin diverged from the rest of the rockabilly crowd in that he didn't go for the leather jacket, greased back hair or any of those trappings. He preferred western wear and expressed it this way in a radio interview: "I started wearing the cowboy hat in 1978, and I dress this way all the time, partly because I'm an entertainer and partly because I like being a touch different." The hat was replaced every year or so by one he'd purchase from Texas Hatters in Austin during his annual sojourns there. The shape was highly personal, as he described it; "a combination of range cowboy droop to brim and a singing cowboy slope to the crown. A lot of people tell me I have my hat on backwards."

The Velours played a mix of originals and eclectic covers to enthusiastic audiences and won quite a few fans, including a piano player, Steve Hocura. Actually, Steve wasn't the first piano player to sit in with us, but he earned his place when he pushed another piano player off the bench onto the floor of the Cabana Room and took over the instrument. He would sit in for raucous sets

## Disc 2

### 1) Wake Me Up I'm Dreamin' (3:39) ☞

(Ned R. Masyk) Linkhorn Music-SOCAN  
The New Neds are: Handsome Ned - Vocals, acoustic guitar, Tony Kenny - Guitar, Ronny Azzopardi - Bass guitar, Billy Rogers - Drums. Recorded in late 1986 at Manta Sound, Toronto. Additional vocals by Tony Kenny and Donny Cartwright Donohue and piano by Mean Steve Hocura, recorded by Corby Luke at Comfort Sound, Toronto, May, 1988.

### 2) Steel Rail Blue (2:09) ☞

(Ned R. Masyk) Linkhorn Music-SOCAN  
Handsome Ned - Vocals, acoustic guitar, taken from a video recorded live on QTV by Keith Holding and Richard Minichello, Father's Day, 1986.

### 3) That'll Be The Love (3:17) ☞

(Ned R. Masyk) Linkhorn Music-SOCAN  
The Handsome Neds are: Handsome Ned - Vocals, acoustic guitar, Rene Fratura - Bass guitar, JD Weatherstone - Drums. Special guest, John MacLeod - Guitar. Recorded at Lee's Palace, Toronto, in 1985; Additional vocals by John Borra, recorded by Peter J. Moore, the E Room, November 1999.

### 4) You'll Never See Midnight (3:11) ☞

(Ned R. Masyk) Linkhorn Music-SOCAN  
Handsome Ned - Vocals, acoustic guitar; Donny Cartwright Donohue - Guitar, background vocals; Recorded live off a CKLN radio broadcast, Toronto, 1985. Bass guitar by Rene Fratura, recorded by Corby Luke, Comfort Sound, Toronto, May 1988. Percussion by Sam Ferrara, recorded by Peter J. Moore, E Room, Toronto, November, 1999.

### 5) Stranger (2:38) ☞

(Howard/Barney) Cedarwood Publishing-BMI  
Handsome Ned Masyk - Vocals, acoustic guitar. Recorded by Echo Dave Richards during Saturday matinee, Feb. 16, 1985, at the Cameron House.

### 6) Johnny Too Bad (4:05) ☞

(Winston Bailey/Roy Beckford/Derrick Crooks/Delroy Wilson) Kenneth Khouri publisher  
The Handsome Neds are: Handsome Ned Masyk - Vocals, acoustic guitar, Steve Koch - Lead and rhythm guitar, Rene Fratura - Bass guitar, JD Weatherstone - Drums. Recorded by Echo Dave Richards at the Cameron Public House, Feb. 16, 1985.

### 7) Silver Wings (4:31) ☞

(Merle Haggard) Blue Book Music-BMI  
The Handsome Neds, Feb. 16, 1985. (see credits on Song 6, Disc 2)

### 8) Little Ole Wine Drinker Me (3:21) ☞

(Mills/Jennings) Moss Rose Publishing  
The Handsome Neds, Feb. 16, 1985. (see credits on Song 6, Disc 2)

### 9) Long Black Veil (3:45) ☞

(Danny Dill/Marjahn Wilkin) Universal Cedarwood Publishing  
The Handsome Neds, Feb. 16, 1985. (see credits on Song 6, Disc 2)

### 10) (Ghost) Riders In The Sky (4:15) ☞

(Stan Jones) E.H. Morris  
The Handsome Neds, Feb. 16, 1985. (see credits on Song 6, Disc 2)

### 11) I've Been Everywhere (3:11) ☞

(Geoff Mack) Rightsong Music Inc.-BMI  
The Handsome Neds (see credits on song 6, Disc 2); Recorded by Echo Dave Richards at Ontario Place Forum, Toronto, for CFGM Opry North broadcast, July 1, 1985.

### 12) One Hundred Miles Off Open Road (2:26) ☞

(Ned R. Masyk) Linkhorn Music-SOCAN  
Handsome Ned Masyk - Vocals, acoustic guitar, Recorded at the Cameron House, July 4, 1984.

### 13) A Fool Such As I (3:51) ☞

(William Teller) Universal MCA Music Publishing  
Handsome Ned and the Hayseed Hellions are: Handsome Ned Masyk - Vocals, acoustic guitar, Trish Cullen - Accordion, Al Keats - Pedal Steel, Steve Koch - Guitar, Jim Masyk - Guitar, Brad Fortham - Bass guitar, Cleave Anderson - Drums, Casey Irwin - Tenor saxophone, Recorded by Echo Dave Richards at the Cameron House, Feb. 11, 1984.

### 14) Missing You (3:51) ☞

(Dale Noel/Red Sovine) Unichappell Music Inc.  
Handsome Ned and the Hayseed Hellions, Feb. 11, 1984. (see credits on Song 13, Disc 2)

### 15) Ain't No Room For Cheatin' (2:55) ☞

(Ned R. Masyk) Linkhorn Music-SOCAN  
Handsome Ned and the Hayseed Hellions, Feb. 11, 1984. (see credits on Song 13, Disc 2)

### 16) The Grand Finale (2:28)

### 17) Tonight The Bottle Let Me Down (8:56) ☞

(Merle Haggard) Shade Tree Music  
Blue Rodeo, Handsome Ned & other Guests for the Blue Rodeo Guitar Benefit: Cleave Anderson - Drums, Jim Cuddy - Guitar, vocals, Bazil Donovan - Bass, Greg Keelor - Guitar, vocals, Bobby Wiseman - Keyboards, Handsome Ned Masyk - Vocals, Steve Koch - Vocals, guitar, Chris Houston - Vocals, Keith Whittaker - Vocals, Ian Culvin - Alto saxophone. Produced by Peter J. Moore and Jim Masyk. Recorded by Peter J. Moore at the Horseshoe Tavern, Toronto, March 27, 1996.

## Disc 1

### 1) Put the Blame On Me (3:05) Ⓢ

(Ned R. Masyk) Linkhorn Music-SOCAN

The Sidewinders are : Handsome Ned Masyk – Vocals, acoustic guitar, Jim Masyk – Lead and rhythm guitar, Ronny Azzopardi – Bass guitar, J.D. Weatherstone – Drums, percussion. The Sidewinders recorded by Rich Dobson at Marigold Sound Toronto, April 1983 Backup vocals on "Put the Blame on Me" by Ronny Azzopardi, recorded by Rich Dobson. Answer guitar by Steve Koch, recorded by Corby Luke, Comfort Sound, Toronto, May 1988.

### 2) I've Come To Get My Baby Out Of Jail (2:28) Ⓢ

(Ned R. Masyk) Linkhorn Music-SOCAN

The Sidewinders, April 1983 (see credits on Song 1, Disc 1), additional vocals by Ronny Azzopardi and Jim Masyk, recorded by Rich Dobson; Piano by Mean Steve Hocura, recorded by Corby Luke at Comfort Sound, Toronto, May, 1988.

### 3) Wrong Side Of The Tracks (3:38) Ⓢ

(Ned R. Masyk) Linkhorn Music-SOCAN

The Sidewinders, April 1983 (see credits on Song 1, Disc 1); Piano by Mean Steve Hocura, recorded by Corby Luke at Comfort Sound, Toronto, May, 1988.

### 4) In Spite Of The Danger (4:08) Ⓢ

(Ned R. Masyk) Linkhorn Music-SOCAN

The Handsome Neds are: Handsome Ned Masyk – Vocals, acoustic guitar, Steve Koch – Lead guitar, vocals, Rene Fratura – Bass guitar, JD Weatherstone – Drums. The Handsome Neds recorded by Rich Dobson at Marigold Sound Toronto, April 1985.

### 5) Ain't No Room For Cheatin' (2:47) Ⓢ

(Ned R. Masyk) Linkhorn Music-SOCAN

The Handsome Neds, April 1985. (see credits on Song 4, Disc 1)

### 6) Rockabilly Girls (2:32) Ⓢ

(Ned R. Masyk) Linkhorn Music-SOCAN

The Sidewinders, April 1983 (see credits on Song 1, Disc 1) Additional guitar by Peppy Martin, recorded by Mike Jones at Eastern Sound, Toronto, March 1989.

### 7) Never Had It So Good (2:57) Ⓢ

(Ronny Azzopardi) Linkhorn Music-SOCAN

The Sidewinders, April 1983 (see credits on Song 1, Disc 1) Background vocals and acoustic guitar by Ronny Azzopardi, recorded by Rich Dobson; Additional vocals by Johnny MacLeod and Jim Masyk, recorded by Mike Jones at Eastern Sound, Toronto, March 1989.

### 8) Restless (3:53) Ⓢ

(Kidd/Wadmore) Mills Music-SOCAN

The Sidewinders, April 1983 (see credits on Song 1, Disc 1) Additional guitar by Steve Koch, recorded by Corby Luke at Comfort Sound, Toronto, May, 1988.

### 9) Sun Rockin' (3:16) Ⓢ

(Jim Masyk) Linkhorn Music-SOCAN

The Sidewinders, April 1983 (see credits on Song 1, Disc 1) Additional vocals by Jim Masyk, recorded by Rich Dobson; Piano by Mean Steve Hocura, additional guitar by Peppy Martin, recorded by Mike Jones at Eastern Sound, Toronto, March 1989.

### 10) Great Shakin' Fever (2:40) Ⓢ

(Fred Burch/Gerald Nelson) Coach and Four Music

The Sidewinders, April 1983 (see credits on Song 1, Disc 1) Back-up vocal by JD Weatherstone, recorded by Rich Dobson.

### 11) Cryin' Heartache Misery (3:10) Ⓢ

(Jim Masyk/Ronny Azzopardi) Linkhorn Music-SOCAN

The Sidewinders, April 1983 (see credits on Song 1, Disc 1) Special guest, Rich Dobson, on electric guitar, background vocals by Ronny Azzopardi, recorded by Rich Dobson. Additional vocals by John MacLeod and acoustic guitar by Peppy Martin, recorded by Mike Jones at Eastern Sound, Toronto, March 1989.

### 12) Sea Of Heartbreak (2:45) Ⓢ

(Hal David/Paul Hampton, Casa David) Shapiro Bernstein & Co.

Handsome Ned Masyk – Vocals, acoustic guitar; Donny Cartwright Donohue – Acoustic guitar, background vocals; Recorded live off a CKLN 88.1 FM radio broadcast, Toronto, 1985. Introduction To Honky Tonk Hardwood Floor Show by Lydia Lunch.

### 13) Put The Blame On Me (3:10) Ⓢ

(Ned R. Masyk) Linkhorn Music-SOCAN

Handsome Ned Masyk – Vocals, acoustic guitar; Donny Cartwright Donohue – Acoustic guitar, background vocals; Recorded live off a CKLN radio broadcast, Toronto, 1985.

### 14) Dim Lights, Thick Smoke (And Loud, Loud Music) (2:43) Ⓢ

(Max Fidler/Joel Mafis/Rosalie Memphis) Comet Music Company

Handsome Ned Masyk – Vocals, acoustic guitar; Donny Cartwright Donohue – Acoustic guitar, background vocals; Recorded live off a CKLN radio broadcast, Toronto, 1985.

### 15) I Still Miss Someone (2:46) Ⓢ

(John R. Cash) Southwind Music-BMI

Handsome Ned Masyk – Vocals, acoustic guitar; Murray McLauchlan – Vocals, acoustic guitar, harmonica; Recorded live off a CKLN broadcast, Toronto, June 19, 1985.

### 16) Bad Bad Boy (3:22) Ⓢ

(Bobby Cochran) All Rock Music

The Sidewinders (see credits on Song 1, Disc 1); Back-up vocals by Jim Masyk and Ronny Azzopardi; Recorded by Bee Masyk live off a barroom table at The Grimsby Tavern, Grimsby, Ontario, September 17, 1982.

that included playing with his feet to see how many keys he could break off of the house piano that night. We dubbed him "Mean Steve Piano" and asked him to join. In early 1981, we changed the name to the "The Sidewinders", Mike and Larry were out, and we brought in Ronny Azzopardi on bass and JD Weatherstone on drums, both with energy and attitude from playing in punk bands, the Next and the Demics, respectively. Mean Steve parted to form his own band and we continued on as a quartet.

In April 1983, the Sidewinders recorded nine songs at Marigold Studios and they all appear here on Disc One. At the time, we released a 45 RPM single, "Put the Blame on Me", backed with "Cryin' Heartache Misery". Other songs from these sessions that are included here are "I've Come to Get My Baby Out of Jail", "Wrong Side of the Tracks", "Rockabilly Girls" (Robin's first composition), "Never Had It So Good", "Restless", "Sun Rockin'", and "Great Shakin' Fever". Also included is the Sidewinders performing a raunchy "Bad Bad Boy" at the Grimsby Hotel in Grimsby, Ontario. Mom recorded the night from her table near the front of the stage. Getting no offers from the record companies, the Sidewinders drifted a bit, then added Cleave

Anderson on drums to replace an absent JD, and sounded better than ever for a few shows. Then we broke up as I chose a daytime career and Robin felt the need to move in a purer country direction.



The Sidewinders NYC 1983.

## HANDSOME NED

Robin had actually started the shift to country earlier when he created a new persona for himself as a solo performer in late 1981. For this he needed a new name, so he became "Ned Lee" for his first solo show. He soon changed it to "Handsome Ned", which he described as a "cornball country moniker". Ned might have thanked me silently for seeing his potential, but he didn't thank me for giving him the sissy name, Robin, and he couldn't wait to change it. For years after he'd announced his new name, I

continued to address him by his given name. He usually grimaced and responded "The name is Ned".

Ned started a long run of Saturday afternoon solo matinees in the back room of the Cameron Public House on January 9th, 1982. He missed few shows, except during his annual pilgrimage to Austin, Texas, and the night he died, January 10, 1987, which



Ned with Eva & the Bad Boys, 1983.

was to be celebrated as his 5th anniversary. In the early days, he had a rule that he wouldn't perform until there were more than 10 people in the audience. Soon he didn't need any rules, as his shows were regularly full-scaled social events where every Saturday up to 150 people would show up

in a room meant to seat 90. At first, he would start at 3:00 PM and as his show became more popular it he pushed it to later in the afternoon until his "matinee" was eventually 7:00 to 10:00 PM. Two songs from this collection were culled from his live solo shows at the Cameron including an early original, "One Hundred Miles of Open Road" It's a travelling tune: "Pass me the map it's sittin' in the back. And the engine's singin' out its own soundtrack. One more victim of life's open road." And he sang "Stranger", the first of three songs performed by one of Ned's favorite singers, Lefty Frizzell.

He took it as a personal mission to cultivate interest in country music, starting with the crowd who frequented the Cameron Public House. Country music was certainly not hip at this time and place and Ned could have dealt in camp in order to get his message across. But he saw country as "a soulful form. I don't put the comedy in it, that's for between songs." To Ned, the big attraction of country music was "a good lyric, a nice twangy guitar lick and good harmonies. And stories being told that people can relate to. It's a layman's form of music."



Escovado, cared about Ned and have Ned stories to tell. I am amazed by all the people he must have met and influenced in his short life, from fans and friends, to the musicians on this record and artists like Augie, Freddie, Alejandro, or like Marcia Ball, who we admired in her Austin gigs in 1978. Years later, after a gig she played at the Horseshoe Tavern, Marcia and her entourage, Ned and I and friends all went to Trish Cullen's apartment for a wonderful all night party and jam session. It was a typical night out for Ned.

A friend, Bob Bridges, reflected on his death with a bit of pathos that Ned would have enjoyed: "All I got are memories and photographs and I think the memories will last longer the same as the hurt when I figure there's still jokes we haven't finished and so it's goodbye Old Paint and off to the rodeo with old Shep and Yeller and Tex and riding the trail with your hat in the clouds with a broken string on your guitar and pants that don't fit and your shirts frayed at the collar and a song that you wrote being sung by others, so I won't forget you Ned."

Brother Jim



The original Cameron House had its tables covered with red terry cloth diapers for beer spills, and at them sat its working class drinkers and colorful drunks. Then in the early '80s, hip new owners took over. The jukebox was updated with good tunes, they started hanging art shows, the vaulted ceiling in the Cameron was painted with rosy cherubs and a sign declaring "This is Paradise" was put up over the bar. There was also a marked shift in clientele. Artists and musicians and people who looked like them started hanging out, many of them peacocks with black leather, dyed hair, or mohawks. Boys smoked hash in the girls' washroom. But interestingly, some of the old crowd lingered, like old Carl, the sweet, wrinkled-faced, story telling, ex-merchant marine, who stayed on for the new crowd and loved Ned and died alone in his hotel room shortly after Ned's passing. Like Ned, the Cameron had great character. They were made for each other and both gained from their association. Ned was a magnet drawing people in and the owners knew it, granting Ned a tab, which would never be paid off and was frequently forgiven. During these years, Ned usually had a room upstairs in the Cameron, sometimes his home, sometimes his office, depending on his

woman situation. Ned would take his business calls at the bar downstairs and conducted interviews in the back room. The Cameron House was Ned headquarters.

In 1982, Ned started trying to build a bigger audience for his style of music with guest spots, and finally, a regular slot on Tuesdays on Ryerson University's CKLN radio station. His show, "The Honky Tonk Hardwood Floorshow", became popular in Toronto as Ned brought in his personal collection of classics by artists like Tex Ritter, the Byrds and Hoyt Axton and played them back-to-back with some of the modern artists they had influenced such as REM and Rank and File. And sometimes he added a touch of music from his own released 45s. Most fans of The Honky Tonk Hardwood Floorshow were receiving their education in country music. Occasionally Ned performed live on his show for a CKLN fundraiser, and some listeners recorded his show right off their radios, complete with static. Five of these tunes are included in this release. "You'll Never See Midnight" may have been inspired by Ned seeing the light reflecting off himself in a storefront window on Queen Street West, an area of Toronto which Ned described as "a one horse town" of a place. Or more likely, by a wandering mind to

Laredo, Texas. Ned is joined on the song by Donnie Cartwright on guitar and backing vocals as well as on "Sea of Heartbreak", "Put the Blame on Me", and "Dim Lights, Thick Smoke (and Loud, Loud Music)". Closing out Disc Two, Ned and Murray McLauchlan were recorded over the air doing "I Still Miss Someone", and while they stumble a bit on the unrehearsed number, I don't think Johnny Cash would mind.

Besides his work with the Sidewinders and his solo activities, Ned had other projects on the go - moonlighting bands like the Running Kind, Hayseed Hellions, Cajun Lust, and collaborating to create reggae country with reggae artist, Mohjah. There were opening spots for shows with Garland Jefferies, Dr. John and Kinky Friedman. He also put on his own musical events such as the 1st Annual Handsome Ned Picnic, held on Toronto Island in the summer of 1994, which assumed that there would be more and they did occur every summer for three years. Another was Honky Tonk Hearts, which featured music, square dancing and quick draw contests in an annual celebration of Valentine's Day. Outside of Toronto, Ned played gigs throughout Ontario, in Montreal, Vancouver, New York City and Austin.

Handsome Ned and the Hayseed Hellions was one of Ned's first side projects. It was a chance to explore the big country band sound of Texas swing outfits like Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys, while further thrusting Ned into the Toronto spotlight as an unstoppable promoter of country music. The line-up included the late Trish Cullen, who Ned convinced to bring out her childhood accordion, Al Kates (from Sylvia Tyson's band) on pedal steel, Steve Koch and I on electric guitars, Ned on vocals and acoustic guitar, Cleave Anderson (ex-Sidewinder and later to join Blue Rodeo) on drums, Brad Fordham (from Rang Tango) on bass, and Casey Irwin playing saxophone. The three Hayseed Hellions songs on Disc Two are from the first, and one of the few, performances of this group. It has a sloppy, but heartfelt, quality, as the project becomes Ned's true coming-out party as a country singer to be reckoned with. In "A Fool Such as I" his voice grows fluid and emotive as he explores the soul of the song to its raw nerve ends and stakes his claim as a powerful interpreter of a country song. Jim Reeves' "Missing You" continues to show what a capable balladeer Ned could be, but Ned didn't sand away the rough edges needed for a song like "Ain't No Room For Cheatin'",

down his own holy path, this lost tribe looking for their answers to mostly non-musical questions. People who didn't know country music were taught through Ned's music and performances. Ned: "Most of them grew up thinking of country music as Hee-Haw, sobbing songs and reams of rhinestones." It's surprising what a wide variety of people loved him with seemingly no common thread. Like the high school student and the teacher who found that they were both big fans of Handsome Ned, but "no" they wouldn't think of going to see him together. Speaking of his effect on other musicians, Jim Cuddy told City-TV in January 1987: "Ned really helped to give focus to a lot of people who were looking to put bands together, or looking for some kind of direction. And he did it pretty single-handedly, I think."

It was a scene that developed in the vicinity of Queen Street West and Spadina Avenue - the walk between the Cameron House and the Horseshoe Tavern - that no one who was there will ever forget. A scene that became mostly unglued and died itself with the departure of Ned and with people moving on the way they do when big changes happen. If you weren't there, you cannot perceive what it was like, how exciting, free and

powerful even the supporting players felt, as if nothing could ever hold us back. And one can only imagine what it was like to be Ned, and to have all that talent, and be so driven to constantly expand his patchwork of relationships and still go off and write songs about loss and loneliness.

Ned was careless in following up on the overtures he had received from music business professionals. He moved at his own speed and on his own terms and like a cultural, whirling dervish he touched down on Queen Street West in 1979, a Handsome stranger who, it seemed, had been everywhere. He made a big splash, turning heads and changing people's lives, then lifted off again seven years later. In spite of his lack of wider acceptance, Ned certainly enjoyed his work and lived the kind of life he wanted to live - singing his original and favorite cover tunes to appreciative audiences, hanging out with talented musicians, artists and drinkers, meeting girls, and getting mostly positive feedback on whatever he did. Amongst Ned's personal items was the NYC address of Augie Meyer, former member of the Sir Douglas Quintet, and Texas Tornados. And I'm told that other Texas stars from the old school, Freddy Fender, and the new school, Alejandro

never surfaced (called “Waste of Time”) the rest of the tunes that Ned intended to be released are on this collection.

Another Ned original, “Steel Rail Blue”, was taken from a video of his live performance recorded by Keith Holding and Richard Minichiello on QTV, a Queen Street West media project which broadcast performances by satellite to California. The opening lyrics are rather poignant and can be found on Ned’s headstone at Mount Pleasant Cemetery in Toronto. “There’s somethin’ sad and lonely ‘bout a freight train slippin’ on wet wheels rollin’ back to places I’ve been. Old steam whistle keeps callin’ my name again and again.”

Peter Moore, who actually attended high school drama classes with Ned in Stoney Creek, engineered and mastered this record and the listener will notice sonic improvements since Virgin Records released some of the same studio songs on the Juno-nominated “The Ballad of Handsome Ned” in 1989. Returning to the original master recordings we took advantage of the huge advances in analogue/digital conversion over the last decade bringing a lot more warmth to the proceedings this time. And besides cleaning noise and hiss from the live tapes, Peter also

recorded the closing track on the Disc Two in this collection, “The Bottle Let Me Down” from a benefit performance by Blue Rodeo, Handsome Ned and others.

In the sense that Handsome Ned’s attitude and principles were drawn from his musical and cultural influences to create his own version of country music, he was a classicist of that art form. But Ned was definitely a romanticist. He expressed this with vigorous self-confidence in his fashion and in the mythology he created out of a borderline, holy reverence for his subjects – country music and the intermingling mysteries of life, death, art, and sex. And he expressed it in his lyrics. While they dealt with the everyday themes of love, loss, and wanderlust, his rhythmic words sometimes rose above common thought and song forms – whether speaking from inside a dream, or threatening to give a train something to scream about – to be almost transcendently romantic.

Ned’s live performances at the Cameron House were often ragged brilliance, filled with warmth that easily filled the room. On that stage he found his voice, like the room itself was his muse, and people came to witness the spectacle, and they gave him added bravura and inspiration. He led them

which the Hayseed Hellions deliver with a New Orleans feel.

Successful with the Hayseed Hellions, Ned made plans to form a permanent, country band. But he did not strive for the Nashville sound, with its crooning voices, lush string arrangements and background choruses. Ned was strongly attracted to the blue collar, hard country movement that thrived in Bakersfield, California in the 1950’s and 1960s. Remembered mostly for its two biggest stars, Buck Owens and Merle Haggard, this sound was designed to ease the working-class angst of weekend revelers and played loud enough to be heard over the din



The Handsome Neds 1985.

in the area’s honky tonks. It featured the high-end sound of Telecaster electric guitars, steel guitars, fiddles and lead and harmony vocals, and was influenced by rock ‘n’ roll and rockabilly, as well as traditional country.

Later in 1984, Ned realized his dream when he formed a four-piece band called “The Handsome Neds”. While the Neds emulated Bakersfield, they added very few harmony vocals and didn’t bother with fiddles or steel guitar. They played stripped down, hard-hitting honky tonk, tailor-made for drinking and dancing, with full working knowledge of country and rockabilly, and their offspring - rock, country rock, and punk, that would appeal to the younger generation of fans. Ned handled vocals and acoustic guitar and again recruited JD Weatherstone, his bandmate in the Sidewinders, on drums. Joining on guitar, Steve Koch was the lead-hand that Ned needed for his new venture. With equal assurance, he could play country (with the Hayseed Hellions), rockabilly (as member of the One Eyed Jacks), and punk (with the Demics and the Viletones). Rounding out the quartet was Rene Fratura, formerly of Vancouver-based band, Herald Nix, playing stand-up bass. Rene could look quite insane and visually gave Ned a run on stage, the way he curled out from his

instrument, rolled back his head, closed his eyes, and twisted his upper lip into a half-crazed, half-grin; a bigger-than-life guy hammering out big notes, sometimes tuning-be-damned. And there was a fifth Handsome Ned – Ned’s longtime soundman, Echo Dave Richards, who was behind the boards for most Handsome Ned gigs and many of the live songs on this collection. You can hear Echo Dave earning his name on this collection of songs as he shadows Ned with his Roland Space Echo on “Johnny Too Bad” and “(Ghost) Riders in the Sky”.

From the same Handsome Neds show in February 1985, they polished off two more Lefty Frizzell gems, “Little Ole Wine Drinker Me”, and the folk music-influenced, “Long Black Veil”, as well as a Merle Haggard tune, “Silver Wings”. At Ontario Place, the Handsome Neds were recorded doing fellow Canadian, Hank Snow’s “I’ve Been Everywhere”. And Ned’s song “That’ll Be the Love” was captured at Lee’s Palace with Johnny MacLeod sitting in for Steve that night on guitar.

Besides these live tunes, there are two studio recordings of the Handsome Neds that were released as a 45-RPM single in mid-1985: “In Spite of the Danger” and “Ain’t No

Room For Cheatin’”. “In Spite of the Danger” is a song that can be construed in a couple of ways, one of them deadly. “In spite of the danger, you let me fall in love with you” is likely written about an affair that Ned took up with a lady named Mickey just as his relationship with Karen was becoming troubled. Karen had fallen for 20-year old Robin, but hadn’t counted on him becoming



Ned at Harbourfront, 1986.

Ned, who now had a growing reputation, ego and list of admirers, and liked to stay out late in the party zone. This eventually split them up and later, after months of hanging out with his new lady’s Kensington Market friends, in spite of the danger Ned finally took his first taste of the drug that would eventually kill him. College radio preferred “In Spite of the Danger”, but “Ain’t No Room For Cheatin’” caught major rotation nationally on the CBC as well as Toronto’s CFGM country music radio station, which led to several appearances on CFGM’s Opry North broadcast. On their first Opry North show, the Handsome Neds received a tumultuous ovation from the crowd and earned the first encore in the history of this taped live broadcast. Ned: “We played “Ghost Riders” and the crowd went nuts. They had lighters in their hands.”

The Handsome Neds had a compelling honky tonk rock ‘n’ roll style with apparent commercial potential and the record labels showed some interest, notably after a Ned appearance on TV. He could give an articulate interview, but they remained lukewarm to him. The big country boom was still around the corner. Ned was insistent on playing music on his terms and the record labels preferred to keep an eye on him for

now. The Handsome Neds eventually split up in the summer of 1986. After a brief pause, Ned continued on, putting together the New Neds, made up of Tony Kenny (later to form the Razorbacks) on guitar, ex-Sidewinders Ronny Azzopardi on bass, and former Johnny Thunders-sideman, Billy Rogers on drums. They played a few shows and recorded one song in late 1986, “Wake Me Up I’m Dreamin’”, which was used in the TV movie, “Christmas Eve”, starring Loretta Young. Every Christmas, this movie plays on TV somewhere in the world and the New Neds can be seen performing this song in the background of a scene at a supposed Nashville club (actually a Toronto club and the closest Ned got to playing the Music City). “Wake Me Up I’m Dreamin’” demonstrates a sensitive songwriter and a pained person moving on from the honky tonk concerns to what’s going to happen when the honky tonk closes down. This is Ned’s last trip to the recording studio. He received a promise of private backing to finally do a full-length album and he recorded some rough demos and prepared to enter the studio with The New Neds during the week of Jan 13, 1987, the week following his death. He had a song list prepared and except for one song that has