



TOM HAWTHORN

Vancouver's rock 'n' roll history comes to tutti-frutti fruition

VICTORIA— From Wednesday's *Globe and Mail* (Feb 1, 2012)

Published Tuesday, Jan. 31, 2012 7:27PM EST

Back in 1956, an eager 11-year-old boy entered the record department at Woodward's in downtown Vancouver. He asked the clerk for *My Prayer* by the Platters.

“I clutched my dollar in hand to get this record,” remembers Brian Tarling. “She told me they were sold out. I was absolutely devastated.”

It was the era of the 78 revolution-per-minute record, a dinner-plate-sized platter of black shellac. The lad wondered if there were any copies in that newfangled format, the 45 rpm single.

“She went back, thumbing through a little box of 45s. And there it was!”

It was the year Elvis Presley made his continental television debut. In January, Elvis the Pelvis released what would be his first No. 1 hit. By the end of the year, he had nine singles on the Billboard Hot 100 and popular music was forever changed.

In Vancouver, the local newspapers recognized this crazy, new rock 'n' roll stuff was taking off with the young set. They began canvassing local disc jockeys for their top picks of the week. Among the most influential of these wax spinners was Red Robinson, the hyperkinetic boy deejay of radio station CJOR. Mr. Robinson soon after moved to CKWX, brought Elvis and the Beatles to town, and became a legend in his own right.

The popular jockey's top-10 picks were soon joined by charts produced by rival stations, which offered longer selections called the “Hi-Fi Forty,” the “Funtastic Fifty,” and the “Sensational Sixty.” There was also a “Boss 30” and a “Silver Dollar Survey,” over the years producing an avalanche of songs and artists and record labels.

The boy who bought the Platters' single grew up to be a chartered accountant. When he retired six years ago, he began a project that only recently came to tutti-frutti fruition – a compilation of every song charted by radio stations in Vancouver from 1956 to 1978.

The result is a self-published volume as thick as a telephone directory. The book lists 7,700 hits by 2,400 artists, from the Beatles to one-hit wonders. The songs are listed by artist, once again by year, and alphabetically by title. You can find out when the tune entered the charts, its peak position, how long it held the peak position, number of weeks (if any) it was in the Top 10, as well as the original Canadian label and catalogue number. The 654-page, \$60 paperback book, with the utilitarian title *Vancouver's Charted Songs, '56 to '78*, tells you just about everything except the brand of car in which the artists cruised.

Designed for fellow record-collector hobbyists, it holds within its practical pages all you need to know about such songs as *Boogie Bear* (Boyd Bennett), *Boogie Child* (Bee Gees), *Boogie Fever* (Sylvers), *Boogie Nights* (Heatwave), *Boogie on Reggae Woman* (Stevie Wonder), and *Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy* (Bette Midler).

A special delight is in coming across such forgotten (forgettable? – ed.) novelties as *Brontosaurus Stomp* by the Piltdown Men, a Hollywood instrumental group with duelling saxophonists who charted briefly in 1960 after the debut of the animated prime-time sitcom, *The Flintstones*.

The painstaking task demanded an accountant's t-crossing, i-dotting attention to detail.

"I've always been interested in the charts and the numbers and how the songs did," Mr. Tarling said. "And I like the music."

An Elvis man, the 66-year-old collector began his task of compiling chart information about the same time that a fellow rock fan, Jim Bower, launched a website featuring Top 40 songs from Vancouver stations. Mr. Tarling was also assisted by Larry (Firedog) Morton, a retired Vancouver fire department captain who had grown up taping songs off the radio with a reel-to-reel tape recorder.

The big hits heard on the radio were joined by popular local acts such as The Prowlers (with Les Vogt, whose *The Blamers* knocked Elvis off the top of the Vancouver charts in 1960) and The Chessmen (featuring rhythm guitarist Terry Jacks, later to have a monster smash with – ear-worm warning – *Seasons in the Sun*). Add a dash of Pacific Northwest bands and a pinch of British Invasion, and the city's radio mix was unlike that heard elsewhere.

The book includes listings for 1,700 songs that charted in Vancouver but did not make Billboard's Hot 100.

Mr. Tarling estimates only 5 per cent of charted songs were Canadian before the introduction of mandatory Canadian content in 1971. Afterwards, about one in five charting songs were homegrown.

In 1979, Mr. Tarling moved into a custom-built house in Burnaby. It was designed with a den intended to hold his record collection, which now numbers 2,000 compact discs, 1,700 long-playing records, and 3,300 singles.

They are catalogued and alphabetized and he claimed to be able to find any tune in less than 30 seconds.

That 45 by the Platters? He has it still.

Special to The Globe and Mail