

Singer-songwriter succumbs to gig offers

By Tom Murray, Freelance July 23, 2010

CONCERT PREVIEW: DOUG ANDREW & THE CIRCUS IN FLAMES

When: Tonight at 8 p.m. Where: Blue Chair Cafe, 9624 76th Ave. Tickets: \$10, call 780-989-2861

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Is it coincidence that Doug Andrew drives a truck for the Vancouver Public Library as his day job?

Maybe, but it's also just a tiny bit ironic that the singer-songwriter, one of his city's most literate, confesses to not taking advantage of this fact.

"I just don't have the time anymore," Andrew protests with mock shame, and there might be some truth in that. Currently touring through Saskatchewan and Alberta, with a stop at the Sasquatch Festival in Driftpile, Andrew is likely seeing more time behind the wheel with his band Circus in Flames than he is the works of his favourite Beat authors.

"Kerouac was always a big one, and I like (Charles) Bukowski as well. I'm more influenced by songwriters, though -- Tom Waits, Dylan, Lou Reed, Lucinda Williams, Hank Williams."

That's a lofty pantheon to aspire to, but Andrew doesn't dishonour the lineage. Whether he's singing a shaggy dog story or a disarming ballad, Andrew always has a slight lyrical twist that startles, while the music is all tension and crackling energy. This has been noticed by critics, fellow musicians and listeners far outside the usual western Canadian clubs he's been touring for more than a decade. His last album, 2006's *A Little Bit of Gasoline*, drew raves from *All Music Guide* and *Americana UK* -- which brings up a rather pertinent point, that his most recent release came out four years ago, which is a long time between studio visits.

"I know, I know. My plan this year was to work on new material, but we kept getting good gig offers," he confesses. "I'm not the world's fastest songwriter. I do have stuff recorded, but I want to let it sit to see whether I like it down the road. I like to tinker with things after they're done, too."

Andrew might be fussy about the recording process, but the results have been invariably excellent, so we'll have to let him off the hook. Besides, he has been busy with a number of outside projects, whether as part of the Ian Tyson tribute that had him touring and sharing an album with Blue Rodeo, Chris Hillman of the Byrds and Corb Lund, or the *Come On in My Kitchen* project.

More recently, Andrew covered Hank Williams's *My Bucket's Got a Hole in It* and recorded his own *The Baptist* for the *Front Porch Roots Revue* compilation, due out later this year. All three projects originated in Edmonton with promoter Peter North, and Andrew is more than happy to acknowledge the helping hand.

"Yeah, I've been pretty lucky with Alberta," he says. "Peter has really helped out with my career, and it just seems like everything happens here. For such a big city, Vancouver really doesn't have a whole lot of places to play, and it seems like people sometimes sit back and wait to be told what's cool and what's not."

"What I like best about Alberta is that people aren't afraid to give their opinions. Whether they like you or not, they'll tell you."