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Profile: Roy Warhurst (See Page 12)



Roy Warhurst, Dick Damron, and Elmer Tippe: Western Canadian Kings of Country Music Tour Germany, c. 1973



Dean Moore (front) when she performed with The Bootleggers in Sacramento, 1988. The Bootleggers, L to R: Ray Robinson, Ivan Wood, R. L. Johson, Don Berkshire, Jack hutchinson, Ronnie Hutchinson, Dave Payne, Dick heil. See Remembering Ronnie Hutchinson, Pages 7 - 11



Roy Rogers and Roy Warhurst c. 1991 (Dale Evans in the background, right) See Profile: Roy Warhurst, Pages 12 - 16



PROFILE: ROY WARHURST

By Tom Hammel

In June, 2016, it was my good fortune to interview Canadian musician and producer Roy Warhurst. Roy currently lives in Pincher Creek, Alberta about an hour west of Lethbridge. This interview was the basis for the following profile; it will also form part of a larger project I am working on, a compiled history of Canadian western swing bands and musicians, from WW II through the 1960s.

Roy Warhurst has had a storied musical career: he has made his mark not only as a much-admired fiddle player, but also as a bandleader, songwriter, radio and television performer and host, studio musician, and as a record producer and music promoter. He has received numerous awards over the years; most recently, he was been honoured with the 2016 Lifetime Achievement Award from the Canadian Grandmasters Fiddling Association, presented in Edmonton. The

award presentation and a moving video tribute to Roy can be seen in the Association's video of the presentation at: <http://tinyurl.com/jsw035s>

Roy's life had modest beginnings. Born on an isolated homestead east of Arborfield, Saskatchewan in 1933, he was delivered by his father. He notes that his birth certificate listed no town or city, only the legal description of the homestead's location. This caused a few problems years later, when Roy applied for his green card, in order to perform in the US: according to Roy, the exasper-



"The Rhythm Pals, heard everyday over CKNW, with guest Roy Warhurst, of Forsythe Road, Whalley", 1947: l to r, Marc Wald, Mike Ferby, Roy, Jack Jensen; and Roy Warhurst c. 1996

ated US Immigration official's reaction was "Where the hell is this?"

Roy's musical endeavours started in 1939 when his uncle, who had enlisted in the navy, brought a number of instruments to his place for safe-keeping. The uncle showed Roy scales on fiddle and banjo and helped him get started. He eventually became proficient enough to play with local musicians at school dances and other local events. Roy's main musical influences were Spade Cooley, Tex Williams and His Western Caravan, and the Sons of the Pioneers; he recalls hearing their music mainly on records, but also on local radio stations: the many transcription recordings made by both the Spade Cooley band and the Sons of the Pioneers in that era ensured that their music was heard wherever country and western music was popular.



On the road to British Columbia: Ted, Ada, Roy and Jack Warhurst pose with a caravan that the boys slept in on a ranch in Montana

Roy's family moved to the Lower Mainland in 1946, reaching the Langley area by working on ranches along their route. The family settled in Surrey, BC, where Roy attended Queen Elizabeth high school. Roy's school principal became a big fan of his music, and would send him to other schools to perform as a kind of musical ambassador: eventually he allowed Roy to leave school early to go on tour.

Shortly after moving to Surrey, and while playing for a box social fundraising event,

Roy had a chance meeting with Marc Wald. Marc was a superb accordionist who had recently joined with singer-guitarist Jack Jensen and Mike Ferbey on bass to perform daily on local radio station CKNW, as The Rhythm Pals; he thought highly enough of Roy's fiddle playing that in early 1947 he invited him to come down to the CKNW

radio station in New Westminster to guest on one of their shows. The show was Bill Rae's Roundup, and Roy performed on-air with The Rhythm Pals: not a bad musical start for a 14-year old teenager! In that era, CKNW's programming featured regular performances by local western swing and country artists. Roy recalls playing with many of them, including Andy Fraser, singer/guitarist Jimmy Morris (Roy says that he had an incredible repertoire of songs), a young Evan Kemp, and steel guitarist Pat Gerow

(who also worked with the 'Pals' on the Burns Chuckwagon Show, broadcast nationally on the CBC).

When the Rhythm Pals went on tour in 1949, CKNW radio suggested that Roy form his own band. In early 1950 he formed the Fraser River Boys with Len 'Ryder' Lemieux (steel guitar), Walter Sundquist (accordion), Doug and Ron Beckett (guitars and vocals), and his brother Jack Warhurst (bass). Roy describes their music as a type of swing, including standard tunes of the day, hoe

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downs, and old-time dance music. This group of teenagers (the youngest 14, the eldest 19) took the local scene by storm, winning the preliminary round of the *Horace Heidt Youth Opportunity Show* at the Orpheum Theatre in Vancouver in July 1950. Their win was spotlighted in a subsequent issue of the Vancouver Sun newspaper (see above).

Later in the summer the band played at the PNE Exhibition, which that year hosted

a *World Championship Western Music Round-up Extravaganza*; Roy placed second in that event's Northwest Open Old Time Fiddling

contest. The Fraser River Boys were featured every Saturday night on CKNW with a half-hour live broadcast, did some shows with Wilf Carter, and went on a couple of tours with Canadian country singer Buddy Reynolds in 1950-

51. They could be heard at local venues such as the New Westminster Legion, the Hollywood Bowl (also in New Westminster), and the Sullivan Hall. They also played



REAL OLD HOEDOWN was heard at the Orpheum Theatre when the Fraser River Boys from Whalley Pit won top prize in The Vancouver Sun talent quest. Their success "floored" Wally Copp, with the "who, me?"

expression when he had to give the wrist watch prize to the group. Winners in the cowboy contest Friday night are Ron Beckett, 16; Doug Beckett, 14; Jack Warhurst, 19; Roy Warhurst, 15; Len Lemieux, 17; Walter Sundquist, 17.



The Fraser River Boys in CKNW studios, c. 1950. l to r: Len Ryder (steel gtr), Jack Warhurst (bass), Walter Sundquist (accordion), Roy Warhurst (fiddle), Jimmy McLaughlin (guitar & vocals), Jimmy Regan (drums). Regan and McLaughlin had replaced the Beckett brothers near the end, when this picture was taken.

many special events: the Mission Soap-box Derby, barn dances in Langley, and the 'out-door' barn dances held at the unfinished Whalley Bowling Alley, before the roof was in place.

Their appearance at the Kitsilano Show Boat with Wilf Carter drew an estimated 5 to 6,000 people. These were good 'training times' as the group worked a great variety of jobs around the Lower Mainland, including many remote broadcasts. Unfortunately, no recordings of the band's performances seem to have survived.

In 1951-52 Roy led a small group called The Saddle Pals, which toured the interior, to Prince Rupert and back. This band consisted of Roy, Rudy Duerden (guitar), Ziggy Austron (accordion), and brother Jack (bass). In late 1950 or early 1951, Roy also began working as a studio musician, with Mike Ferby at the Aragon Records studio in Vancouver. He also recorded with Alberta Slim (who had a record deal with RCA at the time), and did a session with Buddy Reynolds, whose records were issued on

Aragon.

In 1952, Roy got a call from CBC Calgary asking him to join Vic Siebert & the Sons of the Saddle.



The band's ace fiddler, Al Cherney, had recently left for the CKNX Barn Dance in Wingham, Ontario, so it's a measure of Roy's growing reputation, and talent, that he was chosen to replace him. Roy was a member of the group for 7 years, playing bass as well as fiddle; the band worked steadily, performing locally as well as on network radio and television.

Another excellent musician, steel guitarist Johnny Allen, joined the group in 1953, after leaving Edmonton's King Ganam; Allen would stay with the band for well over a decade. (In the early 1950s the Sons Of The Saddle recorded for Aragon Records, which issued two



LPs by the band, along with a number of single releases on 45 and 78 rpm).

Roy recalls that the music scene in Calgary was better than it was in Vancouver at the time. He got the opportunity to meet many great local musicians, including Ray

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and Anne Little, Hod Pharis (who wrote *I Heard The Bluebird Sing*), fiddler Freddie Lang, and The Calgary Range Riders. Roy notes that if you were a good band in this era you could always get a spot on a local radio station, playing live broadcasts.

During one 1954 tour through Alberta, the Sons of the Saddle shared the bill with the well-known Sons Of The Pioneers; this allowed Roy to begin a long-term association with Hugh Farr, the Pioneers' great fiddle player. The two had originally met when the Sons Of The Pioneers played Vancouver in the late 1940s.

The CBC moved Siebert's band to Winnipeg in 1955 to perform on the TV show *Saddle Songs*. (Roy recalls that Lloyd Robertson, later a national news broadcaster for CBC and CTV, was the show's announcer). The Sons Of The Saddle performed swinging instrumentals, and their vocal numbers often featured cowboy harmony singing. To see a YouTube video of the band performing in this era, go to <http://tinyurl.com/Vic-Siebert-Youtube>

Roy put his musical talents to good use, doing both vocal and instrumental arranging for the band. Their many personal appearances included serving as the

opening act for touring Grand Ole Opry stars such as Faron Young, Carl Smith and Marty Robbins.

When Roy's CBC contract ended in 1958, he returned to Calgary. There he formed his own band, playing fiddle with Chuck Kuntz (steel guitar), Larry Kunkel

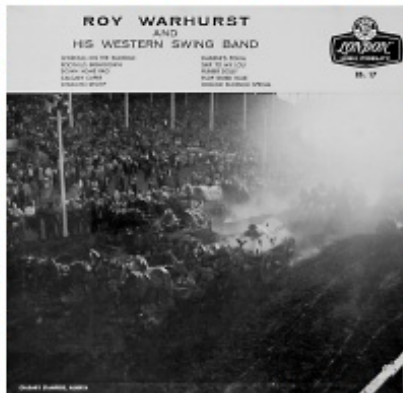
(lead guitar), Duke Massey (bass), Ray Griff (vocals and rhythm guitar) and Jimmy Pepperdine (drums). As Roy Warhurst and his Western Swing Band, they recorded an album for London Records, who also issued the recordings on a number of 45s. The band also backed up various Opry artists, and performed regularly on Calgary's



The Roy Warhurst Band, l to r: Duke Massey, Jimmy Pepperdine, Ray Griff, Larry Kunkel, Chuck Kuntz, Roy Warhurst

CHCT-TV. Roy began producing local TV shows and recruiting talent for the station, while also putting together shows for the Calgary Stampede, a task he performed for some 30 years. Roy was on the Stampede Committee: in 1958 he contacted Hugh Farr, and arranged for the Sons of the Pioneers to do a daily show at the Stampede. In addition, Roy played guest spots on major TV shows, and did quite a bit of work with the Alberta government for tourist promotion, playing in both the US and Canada.

Roy also had considerable success as a record producer. He says it is one of those



things he just fell into; once started, he began to get calls from other musicians and record companies asking for his services. Roy began to find work as a studio musician in Nashville in the early 70s (for both MCA and Capital) after recording his own record 'Country Feeling; the Nashville Sound' there in late 1970, backed by some of Nashville's 'A-team' studio musicians.

Roy recalls fondly his association with veteran country music performer Grandpa Jones, who was at the time a star of both the Hee Haw TV show and the Grand Ole Opry. He notes that Jones knew everyone in the Nashville music business. When Roy was faced with working with people he didn't know, he would call 'Grandpa' up and ask his opinion. If Grandpa approved, he'd say 'the guy, yah, he's alright'; if not, he'd say 'he's a turd'. Roy says 'You could take it to the bank because you knew what he was going to tell you was the way it was, a wonderful old guy, as straight as they come.'

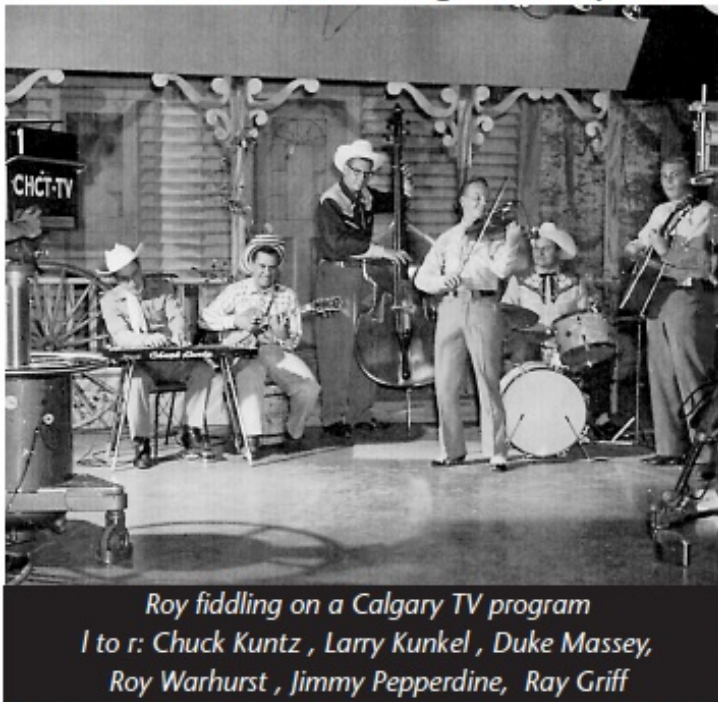
In the 1970s Roy worked with Canadian 'outlaw country' singer Dick Damron. Roy has immense respect for Damron; he states that Dick would have been another Waylon Jennings if he'd been based in the United States, and that there should be more guys like him in the music

business. They did an album together in 1974, *Northwest Rebellion* which consisted entirely of instrumental tracks. Roy wrote one of the tunes, *Pat's Country*, which made it onto a movie soundtrack. Beginning in the 1970s, Roy also traveled to England to perform on a dozen or so occasions, and was featured on country music radio broadcasts by both BBC Two and Radio London.

Throughout the 1960s, 70s and 80s, Roy was involved in a number of TV shows, either as a producer or a musician: *The Irish Rovers Show* in Vancouver; *The Entertainers*, (a CBC Winnipeg production), *Red River Jamboree*, and *Country Time* (produced in Halifax). He made several appearances as a featured fiddle player on *The Tommy Hunter Show*, and also produced *Opry North*, a syndicated radio show that aired in the 1970s and 1980s.

Roy played fiddle on three of *Ian Tyson's* albums, starting in 1978 with *One Jump Ahead of the Devil*. Roy notes that the song *Summer Wages* from one of these albums (*Cowboyography*, released in 1987), was named the song of the decade by the Canadian Association of Broadcasters.

Roy played fiddle for *The Sons of The Pioneers* between 1991 and 1996, but it



Roy fiddling on a Calgary TV program
l to r: Chuck Kuntz , Larry Kunkel , Duke Massey,
Roy Warhurst , Jimmy Pepperdine , Ray Griff



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took a couple of attempts to convince him to join the band. In 1964, Lloyd Perryman initially contacted Roy to try to recruit him as a fiddle player, since Hugh Farr had left the band; but Roy had a young family at the time and the timing didn't work out. In 1988, the band again asked Roy to join. He didn't join at that time, but he did produce an album for them in Tucson, Arizona.

Three years later, one of the band members left in 1991, and he agreed to join the group. Roy moved to Tucson, performing there and in Branson, MI. While he was with them, The Sons Of The Pioneers played at the Grand Ole Opry, which Roy says is one of the musical achievements he's most proud of.

Roy has also been immortalized in song by Canadian fiddle player Calvin Vollrath. *The Roy Warhurst*

Breakdown is a song that Calvin wrote as a tribute to Roy, who comments with a smile, 'I'll have to pay him back for that!' Roy has

the highest regard for Calvin's fiddle playing, so this gesture, a mark of great respect, has real meaning for him. Like his recent Lifetime Achievement Award, the tribute is well deserved: this talented fiddler, producer, radio and television star, touring musician, composer and recording artist has left quite a footprint in the

musical landscape of Canada and abroad.

Besides his musical career, Roy has had a hand in various nonmusical business endeavours, owning a printing plant, the Mountain Aire Lodge near Banff National Park (purchased in 1972), and a real estate and insurance company. He retired in 1997 and now makes his home with his wife Lynne in Pincher Creek, deep in southern Alberta cowboy country.



Roy Warhurst, kneeling, center: with the Sons of the Pioneers



Hugh Farr and Roy, 1948

A NOTE TO ALL MEMBERS

If you have an e-mail address we would appreciate your forwarding it to us, either directly by sending an e-mail to: mydogbob@shaw.ca or by including it when you next send in your dues. The cost of postage has risen over the years and we could save that expense by sending our flyers to you via e-mail.

Thank you for your cooperation in this matter.