

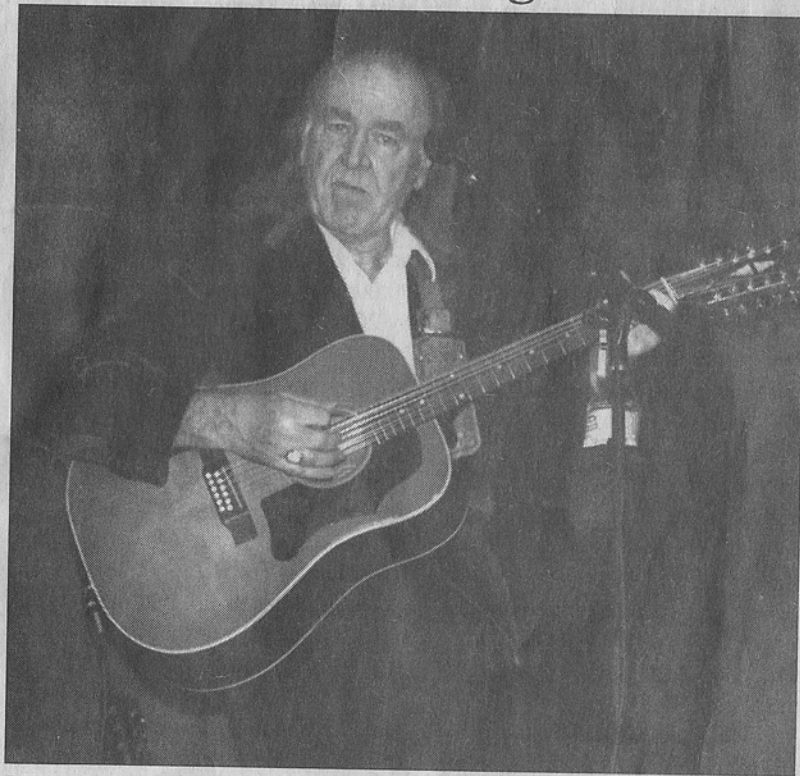
Gordon Lightfoot Tribute at Ontonagon Theater

Harold S. Riter Reporting

Mike Fornes was on stage at the Ontonagon Theater of Performing Arts Friday evening, August 8 to present a program of Gordon Lightfoot selections. Fornes is a retired radio and television sports announcer who does an impersonation of the well known Canadian songwriter and folk singer Gordon Lightfoot. Fornes plays the role of "Lightfoot in the first person," as he explains how featured selections of Lightfoot's songs came to be written. He also tries to emulate the clothing styles and mannerisms the Canadian songwriter and also chooses to use a Gibson 12-string acoustic guitar which is a Lightfoot trademark along with a standard C.F. Martin folk model.

Fornes is a writer in his own right having published books on the history of the Mackinac Bridge and the USCG Cutter Mackinac.

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Mike Fornes, as Gordon Lightfoot, sings "Wreck of the Edmond Fitzgerald" using a 12-string Gibson guitar.

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Fornes has done an extensive study of Lightfoot's music and played the performance entirely from memory in a spontaneous style.

Gordon Lightfoot, a native Canadian, became an icon in this country with "The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald," a song of his creation with which he is immediately recognized. Fornes, after a bit of explanation of why there was a minor lyrics change from the original version, played this number mid-way through his program, however, we would be doing Lightfoot (and Fornes) a disservice if we didn't mention some of the other selections presented.

"If You Could Read My Mind" was Lightfoot's breakthrough into the US musical scene which was recorded in 1970 and met with immediate applause from the local audience. "Pickin' Up the Pieces," "Summertime Breezes" "Alberta Bound," and selections from his Canadian Railroad Trilogy were among the over two dozen selections rendered by Fornes, who rotated instruments and demonstrated a guitar playing style very similar to Lightfoot's.

Fornes sings in a very clear voice, and the sound control at the Theater was outstanding. Many of the audience, during the intermission, commented on how easy the program was to listen to and how comfortable the sound level was.

For those who may need the fol-

lowing information, Gordon Lightfoot was born in Orillia, Ontario, Canada on November 17, 1938. As a young lad, he sang in a boy's church choir as a soprano until his voice changed, but has stated that it was this experience that taught him to sing with expression and to "sing out" with conviction. He is self-taught on guitar and was an accomplished high school athlete. He has been married twice and is the father of six children.

In 2002, at the age of 64, Lightfoot suffered a ruptured abdominal aortic aneurism and underwent surgery for the condition. He was in a coma for six weeks. It was a two year road to recovery, but Lightfoot resumed his performing career in July of 2004. In September of 2006 in the middle of a performance, Lightfoot suffered a mild stroke which left his right hand partially paralyzed requiring him to use a back-up musician to play guitar. By 2007 he had regained the full use of his hand and continues to compose and perform today at the age of 75.

The real feature of Mike Fornes' portrayal of Gordon Lightfoot are the songs, an immense output of ballads about Canada, the Great Lakes, the weather, the legends, and the general romance of the region. Most school history textbooks inform young people very little about the Great Lakes, but perhaps the legacy of Lightfoot and other folk singers will carry some of the message to present and future generations.